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# SERMONS,

BY


## HUGH BLAIR, D.D. F.R.S. Ed.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH,

AND

PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.


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THE

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# SERMON I.

## On the CAUSES of MEN's being weary of Life.

JOB, X. 1.

*My soul is weary of my life.*——

JOB, in the first part of his days, was *the greatest of all the men of the East.* His possessions were large; his family was numerous and flourishing; his own character was fair and blameless. Yet this man it pleased God to visit with extraordinary reverses of fortune. He was robbed of his whole substance. His sons and daughters all perished; and he himself, fallen from his high estate, childless, and reduced to poverty, was smitten

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with sore disease. His friends came about him, seemingly with the purpose of administering comfort. But from a harsh and ill-founded construction of the intention of Providence in his disasters, they only added to his sorrows by unjust upbraiding. Hence those many pathetic lamentations with which this Book abounds, poured forth in the most beautiful and touching strain of Oriental poetry. In one of those hours of lamentation, the sentiment in the text was uttered; *My soul is weary of my life*; a sentiment, which surely, if any situation can justify it, was allowable in the case of Job.

In situations very different from that of Job, under calamities far less severe, it is not uncommon to find such a sentiment working in the heart, and sometimes breaking forth from the lips of men. Many, very many there are, who, on one occasion or other, have experienced this weariness of life, and been tempted to wish that it would come to a close. Let us now examine in what circumstances this feeling may be deemed excus-



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able; in what it is to be held sinful; and under what restrictions we may, on any occasion, be permitted to say, *My soul is weary of my life.* SERMON I.

I SHALL consider the words of the text in three lights: as expressing, *First*, The sentiment of a discontented man: *Secondly*, The sentiment of an afflicted man; *Thirdly*, The sentiment of a devout man.

I. Let us consider the text as expressing the sentiment of a discontented man; with whom it is the effusion of spleen, vexation, and dissatisfaction with life, arising from causes neither laudable nor justifiable. There are chiefly three classes of men who are liable to this disease of the mind; the idle; the luxurious; the criminal.

*First*, THIS weariness of life is often found among the idle; persons commonly in easy circumstances of fortune, who are not engaged in any of the laborious occupations of the world, and who are at the same time, without energy of mind to call them forth into any other line of



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active exertion. In this languid, or rather topid state, they have so many vacant hours, and are so much at a loss how to fill up their time, that their spirits utterly sink; they become burdensome to themselves, and to every one around them; and drag with pain the load of existence. What a convincing proof is hereby afforded, that man was designed by his Creator to be an active being, whose happiness is to be found not merely in rest, but in occupation and pursuit! The idle are doomed to suffer the natural punishment of their inactivity and folly; and from their complaints of the tiresomeness of life there is no remedy but to awake from the dream of sloth, and to fill up with proper employment the miserable vacancies of their days. Let them study to become useful to the world, and they shall soon become less burdensome to themselves. They shall begin to enjoy existence; they shall reap the rewards which Providence has annexed to virtuous activity; and have no more cause to say *My soul is weary of my life.*

*Next,*

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*Next*, THE luxurious and the dissipated form another class of men, among whom such complaints are still more frequent. With them they are not the fruit of idleness. These are men who have been busied enough; they have run the whole race of pleasure; but they have run it with such inconsiderate speed, that it terminates in weariness and vexation of spirit. By the perpetual course of dissipation in which they are engaged; by the excesses which they indulge; by the riotous revel, and the midnight, or rather morning, hours to which they prolong their festivity; they have debilitated their bodies, and worn out their spirits. Satiated with the repetition of their accustomed pleasures, and yet unable to find any new ones in their places; wandering round and round their former haunts of joy, and ever returning disappointed; weary of themselves, and of all things about them, their spirits are oppressed with a deadly gloom, and the complaint bursts forth of odious life and a miserable world. Never are these complaints more frequent than at the close



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of rounds of amusement, and after a long repetition of festal pleasures; when the spirits which had been forced up, as by some intoxicating drug, to an unnatural height, subside into profound dejection. What increases the evil is, that it is not among the infirm, and the aged, but among the young, the gay, and the prosperous, who ought to be reputed the happiest men, that this distaste of life most frequently prevails.

When persons of this description, in their peevish and splenetic hours, exclaim, *My soul is weary of my life*, let them know, let them be assured, that this is no other than the judgment of God overtaking them for their vices and follies. Their complaints of misery are entitled to no compassion; nay, they are sinful, because they arise from a sinful cause; from a mind broken and debased by luxury and corruption. They are the authors of their own misery, by having thrown away on the follies of the world those powers which God had bestowed on them for nobler ends.—Let them return to the duties of men and Christians.

Let

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Let them retreat from frivolity, and abstain from excess. Let them study temperance, moderation, and self-command. By entering on a virtuous and manly course of action, and applying to the honourable discharge of the functions of their station, they will acquire different views. They will obtain more real enjoyment of life, and become more willing to prolong it.——But, after the warnings which God has given them of their misbehaviour by the inward misery they suffer, if they still continue to run the same intemperate round, and to drain pleasure to the last dregs, it shall come to pass, that they who now contemn life, and are impatient of its continuance, shall be the persons most eager to prolong it. When they behold it in reality drawing towards a close, and are obliged to look forward to what is to come after it, they shall be rendered awfully sensible of its value. They will then grasp eagerly at the flying hours; anxious to stop them if they could, and to employ every moment that remains in repairing their past errors, and in making their



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SERMON I. peace, if possible, with God and heaven. According as *they have sown*, they now *reap*. They are reduced *to eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices.*

THERE remains still a third class of those who from discontent are become weary of life; such as have embittered it to themselves by the consciousness of criminal deeds. They have been, perhaps, unnatural to their parents, or treacherous to their friends; they have violated their fidelity; have ensnared and ruined the innocent; or have occasioned the death of others. There is no wonder that such persons should lose their relish for life. To whatever arts they may have recourse for procuring a deceitful peace, conscience will at times exert its native power, and shake over them its terrific scourge. The internal misery they endure has sometimes arisen to such a height, as had made them terminate, with their own hands, an existence which they felt to be insupportable.—To the complaints of such persons no remedy

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can be furnished, except what arises from the bitterness of sincere and deep repentance. We can do no more than exhort them to atone as much as is in their power for the evils they have committed; and to fly to the divine mercy through Jesus Christ for pardon and forgiveness. Let us now, SERMON I.

II. TURN to persons of another description, and consider the sentiment in the text as extorted by situations of distress. These are so variously multiplied in the world, and often so oppressive and heavy, that assuredly it is not uncommon to hear the afflicted complain that they are weary of life. Their complaints, if not always allowable, yet certainly are more excusable than those which flow from the sources of dissatisfaction already mentioned. They are sufferers, not so much through their own misconduct, as through the appointment of Providence; and therefore to persons in this situation it may seem more needful to offer consolation, than to give admonition. However, as the evils which produce this impatience of life are of different

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ent sorts, a distinction must be made as to the situations which can most excuse it.

SOMETIMES, the exclamation in the text may be occasioned by deep and overwhelming grief. When they whom we had most affectionately loved, and in whom we had placed the felicity of our days, are taken away, our connection with life appears to be dissolved. "Why "should we survive those to whom our "souls were tied? Would to God we "had died before them! Now when they "are gone, all pleasure and hope is gone "as to us. To us the sun no longer shines "with its usual brightness. No longer "cheerfulness invests the face of Nature. "On every object a sad gloom appears "to rest; and every employment of life "is become an oppressive burden." With the feelings of those who are thus distressed we naturally sympathise. They are frequently the feelings of the most virtuous and amiable minds: And yet such persons must be told, that grief may be indulged so far as to become immoderate and improper. There are bounds which

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which are prescribed to it both by reason and by religion. A Christian ought not to *mourn like those who have no hope.* While he feels his sorrows as a man, he should also study to bear them like a man, with fortitude; and not abandon himself to feeble and fruitless melancholy. Let him have recourse to a strenuous discharge of the duties of his station, and consider it as incumbent on him to make the best improvement that he can of those comforts which Providence has still left in his possession. SERMON I.

AGAIN; it sometimes happens that, apart from grief, great reverses of worldly fortune give rise to the lamentation in the text. This was the case with Job himself. A sudden fall from opulence into indigence and want; some undeserved disgrace incurred, or some unexpected cloud thrown over former reputation and fame; the unkindness and desertion of friends, or the insolent triumph of enemies, are apt to overwhelm the minds of men with gloom, and to reduce them to be weary of life. To persons under such

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such calamities, sympathy is due. That sympathy, however, will be proportioned to the degree in which we consider them as free from blame in the misfortunes which they suffer. As far as, through their own misconduct and vice, they have been the authors to themselves, of those misfortunes, we withdraw our pity. The burden which they have brought on themselves, we leave them to bear as they can; and with little concern we hear them exclaim that their *souls are weary of life.*——Not only so, but even in cases where calamities have fallen on the innocent, to the pity which we feel for them will be joined a secret contempt, if we perceive that together with their prosperity, their courage and fortitude have also forsaken them. To abandon themselves to dejection, carries no mark of a great or a worthy mind. Instead of declaring that his *soul is weary of his life*, it becomes a brave and a good man, in the evil day, with firmness to maintain his post; to bear up against the storm; to have recourse to those advantages which, in the worst of times, are always

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always left to integrity and virtue; and never to give up the hope that better days may yet arise. SERMON I.

It is good for persons in such situations to remark that, though Job was for a long while severely tried by a variety of distresses, yet his condition was not left finally unhappy. On the contrary, the goodness of that God whom he had served returned at last to shine upon him with greater brightness than ever. His riches were restored to him twofold. The losses in his family were repaired by a new offspring. His name became again renowned in the east; and *the latter end of Job*, we are told, *was more blessed than the beginning*.

But still, it may be asked, will not the continuance of long and severe disease justify the exclamation in the text, *My soul is weary of my life?* To persons who are forsaken by all the blessings of health, and who have no prospect left, but that of lingering under sickness or pain, Job's complaint may assuredly be forgiven more than to any others. Though



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it might be suggested to them, that even in old age and sickness, except in very extreme cases some resources are always left, of which they may avail themselves for relief; yet it must be admitted, that lawfully they may wish their sufferings to be brought to an end. Still, however, they must remember, that resignation to the pleasure of Heaven continues to be their duty to the last. As long as any part remains to be acted, as long as their continuance in the world can serve any valuable purpose, it is more honourable to bear the load with magnanimity, than to give way to a querulous and dejected spirit. It remains,

III. To address myself to another order of men, among whom, though more rarely than among those whom I have described, the sentiment of the text is to be found. They are persons who have no particular complaint to make of the injustice of the world, or the afflictions of their state. But they are tired of the vanity of the world, of its insipid enjoyments, and its perpetually revolving circle of

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of trifles and follies. They feel themselves made for something greater and nobler. They are disgusted and hurt with the scenes of wickedness that are often passing before their eyes. Their hearts are warmed with the thoughts of a purer and more perfect existence designed for man; and in the moments of aspiration after it, the exclamation breaks forth, *My soul is weary of my life.—Oh! that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away and be at rest. Lo! then I would wander afar off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Wickedness is in the midst thereof; deceit and guile depart not from her streets* *. In this view the sentiment in the text may sometimes be that of a devout man. But such persons I must admonish, that their devotion, however sincere, is not altogether of a rational and chastened kind. It was from this temper that, in former ages of the church, the numerous race sprung of anchorets, SERMON L

* Psalm lv. 6—11.

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SERMON L.

chorets, hermits, and all the various orders who voluntarily abandoned the world, to people the lonely desarts and the monastic retreat. The ordinary course of things seemed below them as candidates for heaven. The concerns of the world appeared unworthy of their attention, and dangerous to their virtue. Breathing after a higher state, they imagined that they could not abstract themselves too much from every earthly amusement, as long as they were forced to remain in this place of exile.

Let us beware of all such imaginary refinements as produce a total disrelish of our present condition. They are, for the most part, grafted either on disappointed pursuits, or on a melancholy and splenetic cast of mind. They are far from contributing to happiness, and are inconsistent with all the active virtues of man. This life deserves not indeed to be put in competition with that blessed immortality to which God has raised our hopes. But such as it is, it is the gift of God. It is the sphere in which his wisdom has placed us, and appointed us to

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to act our parts. As long as it lasts, we must neither slight the duties which it requires, nor undervalue the innocent enjoyments which it offers. It belongs to a man to live among men as his brethren; which he who declares himself weary of life is not qualified to do with propriety. SERMON I.

THUS I have placed before you, in various views, the sentiment in the text; and have shewn in what circumstances, and from what causes, that disrelish of life arises which is often found among mankind. On a review of the whole we cannot but acknowledge, that it is oftener to be ascribed to our own vices and follies, than to any other cause. Among the multitudes in the world, to whom at this day life is burdensome, the far greater number is of those who have rendered it so themselves. Their idleness, their luxury and pleasures, their criminal deeds, their immoderate passions, their timidity and baseness of mind, have dejected them in such a degree, as to



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SERMON I

make them weary of their existence. Preyed upon by discontent of their own creating, they complain of life when they ought to reprehend themselves.

Various afflictions there doubtless are in the world; many persons with whom we have cause to sympathise, and whom we might reasonably forgive for wishing death to close their sorrows. But of the evils which imbitter life, it must be admitted, that the greater part is such as we have brought on ourselves; or at least such as, if we were not wanting to ourselves, might be tolerably supported. When we compute the numbers of those who are disposed to say, *My soul is weary of my life*, some there are to whom this sentiment is excusable; but many more among whom it is in no way justifiable. I admit that among the worthiest and the best, there may be dark moments in which some feeling of this nature may be apt to intrude upon their minds. But with them they are only moments of occasional and passing gloom. They soon recal the vigour of their minds; and return with satisfaction

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tion to the discharge of the duties, and to a participation of the enjoyments of life. SERMON I.

One great cause of men's becoming weary of life is grounded on the mistaken views of it which they have formed, and the false hopes which they have entertained from it. They have expected a scene of enjoyment; and when they meet with disappointments and distresses, they complain of life as if it had cheated and betrayed them. God ordained no such possession for man on earth as continued pleasure. For the wisest purposes he designed our state to be checquered with pleasure and pain. As such let us receive it, and make the best of what is doomed to be our lot. Let us remain persuaded, that simple and moderate pleasures are always the best; that virtue and a good conscience are the surest foundations of enjoyment; that he who serves his God and his Saviour with the purest intentions, and governs his passions with the greatest care, is likely to lead the happiest life. Following these principles, we shall meet with fewer occasions of being weary



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SERMON I.

of life; we shall always find some satisfactions mixed with its crosses; and shall be enabled to wait with a humble and contented mind till the Almighty, in his appointed time, finish our state of trial, and remove us to a more blessed abode.

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# SERMON II.

## On CHARITY as the End of the COMMANDMENT.

1 TIMOTHY, i. 5.

*Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

SERMON II.

IT appears from this chapter that one design of the Apostle, in writing to Timothy, was to guard him against certain corrupters of Christian doctrine, who had already arisen in the church. To their false representations of religion he opposes that general view of it which is given in the text. Such summaries of religion frequently occur in the sacred writings; and are extremely useful. By



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SERMON II.

the comprehensive energy with which they express the great lines of our duty, they both imprint them on our memory, and bring them home to our conscience with force. In the progress of this discourse, I hope to make it appear, that the words of the text afford a most enlarged and instructive view of religion in all its chief parts.

The Apostle pronounces charity to be *the end* or scope *of the commandment*, that is, of the law of God. At the same time, in order to prevent mistakes on this most important subject, he subjoins to charity certain adjuncts, as necessary to qualify it, and to render the Christian character complete. These are the *pure heart*, the *good conscience*, and *faith unfeigned*. In treating of these, I shall shew the nature of their connexion with charity, and the importance of their being always united with it.

*The end of the commandment is charity.* Charity is the same with benevolence or love; and is the term uniformly employed, in the New Testament, to denote all the good affections which we ought to

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SERMON II.

to bear towards one another. It consists not in speculative ideas of general benevolence floating in the head, and leaving the heart, as speculations too often do, untouched and cold. Neither is it confined to that indolent good-nature, which makes us rest satisfied with being free from inveterate malice, or ill-will to our fellow-creatures, without prompting us to be of service to any. True charity is an active principle. It is not properly a single virtue; but a disposition residing in the heart, as a fountain whence all the virtues of benignity, candour, forbearance, generosity, compassion, and liberality flow, as so many native streams. From general good-will to all, it extends its influence particularly to those with whom we stand in nearest connection, and who are directly within the sphere of our good offices. From the country or community to which we belong, it descends to the smaller associations of neighbourhood, relations, and friends; and spreads itself over the whole circle of social and domestic life. I mean not that it imports a promiscuous undistin-



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SERMON II.

guishing affection, which gives every man an equal title to our love. Charity, if we should endeavour to carry it so far, would be rendered an impracticable virtue, and would resolve itself into mere words, without affecting the heart. True charity attempts not to shut our eyes to the distinction between good and bad men; nor to warm our hearts equally to those who befriend and those who injure us. It reserves our esteem for good men, and our complacency for our friends. Towards our enemies it inspires forgiveness and humanity. It breathes universal candour, and liberality of sentiment. It forms gentleness of temper, and dictates affability of manners. It prompts corresponding sympathies with them who rejoice and them who weep. It teaches us to slight and despise no man. Charity is the comforter of the afflicted, the protector of the oppressed, the reconciler of differences, the intercessor for offenders. It is faithfulness in the friend, public spirit in the magistrate, equity and patience in the judge, moderation in the sovereign, and loyalty

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loyalty in the subject. In parents it is care and attention; in children it is reverence and submission. In a word, it is the soul of social life. It is the sun that enlivens and cheers the abodes of men. It is *like the dew of Hermon*, says the Psalmist, *and the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore* *.

SUCH charity, says the text, is *the end of the commandment*. This assertion of the Apostle is undoubtedly consonant to all that reason can suggest on the subject of religion. For on considering the nature of the Supreme Being, reason gives us much ground to believe, that the chief design of all the commandments which he has given to men, is to promote their happiness. Independent and self-sufficient, that Supreme Being has nothing to exact from us for his own interest or felicity. By our services he cannot be benefited, nor by our offences injured. When he created the world, it was benevolence that

* Pſal. cxxxiii. 3.

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SERMON II.

moved him to confer existence. When he made himself known to his creatures, benevolence in like manner moved him to give them laws for their conduct. Benevolence is the spring of legislation in the Deity, as much as it was the motive of creation. He issued his commands on earth on purpose that, by obedience to them, his creatures might be rendered happy among themselves in this life, and be prepared for greater happiness in another. Charity, especially when joined with purity, good conscience, and faith, is obviously the great instrument for this purpose; and therefore must needs possess the chief and primary place in the laws of God.

Accordingly, throughout the New Testament, it is uniformly presented to us in the same light in which it is placed by the text. This is known to all who have any acquaintance with the sacred books. Charity is termed *the fulfilling of the law*, and *the bond of perfectness*. It was assumed by our Blessed Lord as the characteristical distinction of his disciples; and in that magnificent eulogium which the apostle

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apostle Paul pronounces upon it, in the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, it is expressly preferred by him to *faith* and *hope*. This deserves to be seriously considered by those who are apt to undervalue charity as an appendage of what they contemptuously call Morality; while they confine true religion to some favourite tenets and observances of their own, which they consider as comprehending the sum of what is acceptable to God. Such persons shew themselves profoundly ignorant of the nature of religion, and may too often be suspected of being strangers to its influence. For, as the apostle John reasons, *He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love that God whom he hath not seen* *?



At the same time, while I ascribe to charity that high place in the system of religion, which justly belongs to it, I am not to be understood as confining all religion to this disposition alone. With much

* 1 John, iv. 20.

wisdom

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wisdom and propriety, the text hath annexed to it certain adjuncts, without which neither the character of a good man can be completed, nor charity itself exercised to advantage. To the consideration of these I now proceed; and I enter the more readily on this branch of the subject, as there is ground to believe, that many pretend to possess charity, without properly understanding its nature and efficacy. There has been always an unhappy tendency among men to run to extremes, on one side or other, in matters of religion. As one set of men, who employ all their zeal on right belief, are prone to undervalue good practice; so another set, who wish to be esteemed rational Christians, are inclined to rest the whole of their duty on charitable deeds, while they overlook certain dispositions and habits which ought always to accompany them. It is therefore of importance that the mistakes of both these classes of men should be rectified, in order that religion may be held forth to the world in its complete form, and in its full and undiminished lustre.

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THE first qualification of charity pointed out in the text is purity; *charity out of a pure heart.* Purity includes the virtues which belong to the individual, considered in himself, and with respect to the government of his desires and pleasures. It hath its seat in the heart; but extends its influence over so much of the outward conduct, as to form a great and material part of the character. They are only the *pure in heart*, we are told by our Saviour, *who can see God* *. It is also true, that they are only the *pure in heart* who can properly discharge their duties towards mankind. Inordinate love of pleasure, intemperance, sensuality, and a course of irregular life, are inconsistent, not only with the general character of a good man, but also with the peculiar exercises of charity and benevolence. For nothing is more certain than that habits of licentious indulgence contribute to stifle all the good affections; to harden the heart; to nourish that selfish attachment to our own vicious pleasures which

* Matth. v. 8.

renders

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SERMON II. renders us insensible to the circumstances and wants of others. A profligate man is seldom found to be a good husband, a good father, or a beneficent neighbour. How many young persons have at first set out in the world with excellent dispositions of heart; generous, charitable, and humane; kind to their friends, and amiable among all with whom they had intercourse? And yet how often have we seen all those fair appearances unhappily blasted in the progress of life, merely through the influence of loose and corrupting pleasures; and those very persons who promised once to be the blessings to the world, sunk down in the end, to be the burden and nuisance of society! The profusion of expence which their pleasures occasion, accounts in a great measure for the fatal reverse that takes place in their character. It not only drains the sources whence the streams of beneficence should flow, but often obliges them to become oppressive and cruel to those whom it was their duty to have patronised and supported.

Purity

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Purity of heart and conduct must therefore be held fundamental to charity and love, as well as to general piety and virtue. The licentious, I know, are ready to imagine, that their occasional deeds of bounty and liberality will atone for many of their private disorders. But, besides that such plans of compensation for vices, by some supposed virtues, are always fallacious, the licentious may be assured, that it is an appearance only of charity, not the reality of it, to which they can lay claim. For that great virtue consists not in occasional actions of humanity, in fits of kindness or compassion, to which bad men may be prompted by natural instinct; but in the steady and regular exercise of those good affections, and the discharge of those important duties towards others, for which the licentious are in a great measure disqualified. Their criminal propensities direct their inclinations to very different objects and pursuits; and often determine them to sacrifice the just rights of others, sometimes to sacrifice the peace and the reputation of the innocent, to the gratifi-



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cation of their passions. Such is the pernicious influence which the love of pleasure has on the good qualities of its devoted votaries. The impure heart is like the stagnant and putrifying lake, which sends forth its poisonous exhalations to corrupt and wither every plant that grows on its banks.

THE second qualification annexed to charity in the text is, that it be *of a good conscience*. By this I understand the Apostle to mean, that charity be in full consistency with justice and integrity; that the *conscience* of the man, who purposes to perform actions of benevolence, be free from the reproach of having neglected the primary duties of equity. For, undoubtedly, justice is a virtue primary to charity; that is, it must go before it in all its exertions. One must first *do justly* before he can pretend that he *loves mercy*.— Religion, my friends, in order to render it useful to mankind, must be brought down by its teachers from the sublimity of speculation to the functions and occupations of ordinary life. It is



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my duty to admonish you, that you must, in the first place, be fair in all your dealings with others; you must discharge the debts you owe; you must pay the wages due to your servants and dependents; you must provide for your own family, and be just to the claims of relations; then, and then only, you can, *from a good conscience*, as the text enjoins, perform acts of generosity and mercy.

This leads to a reflection which here deserves our attention; that in order to fulfil that *charity which is the end of the commandment*, œconomy, and good order in private life, ought to be carefully studied by all Christians. This is more closely connected with *a good conscience*, than many seem inclined to admit. Oeconomy, when prudently and temperately conducted, is the safeguard of many virtues; and is in a particular manner favourable to the exertions of benevolence. He who by inconsiderate conduct is injuring his circumstances, will probably in time lose the inclination, and certainly is depriving himself of the means, of being serviceable to his brethren. Some



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important exertions, indeed, there are of charity, which have no connection with giving or bestowing. Candour, forgiveness, gentleness, and sympathy, are due to our brethren at all times, and in every situation of our own fortune. The poor have opportunities for displaying these virtues, as well as the rich. They who have nothing to give can often afford relief to others, by imparting what they feel. But, as far as beneficence is included in charity, we ought always to remember, that justice must, in the first place, be held inviolably sacred.

The wisdom of Scripture remarkably appears, in the connection pointed out by the text between *charity* and *good conscience*, or integrity; a connection which I apprehend is often not attended to so much as it deserves. Among the frugal and industrious, great regard is commonly paid to justice. They will not defraud. They will not take any unlawful advantage in their dealings: And, satisfied with this degree of *good conscience*, they are strangers to that charity which is the *end of the commandment*. They are hard and unfeeling.

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unfeeling. They are rigid and severe in their demands. They know nothing of humanity, forgiveness or compassion.— Among another class of men, who have been more liberally educated, and who are generally of a higher rank in life, justice is apt to be considered as a virtue less noble than charity; and which may, on some occasions, be dispensed with. They are humane, perhaps, and tender in their feelings. They are easy to their dependents. They can be liberal, even to profusion. While, at the same time, they are accumulating debts, which they know themselves unable to discharge. Their affairs are allowed to run into confusion. Oeconomy and good order are neglected. The innocent, in great numbers, suffer materially through their mismanagement: And all the while they assume to themselves the praise of being generous and good-hearted men. This surely is not that *charity* which the Gospel enjoins; and which, in its very essence, involves *good conscience* and integrity. He, who pretends to do good to his brethren without first doing them justice, cannot be account-





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ed their real friend. True charity is not a meteor, which occasionally glares; but a luminary, which, in its orderly and regular course, dispenses a benignant influence.

THE third and last adjunct connected in the text with charity is, that it be *of faith unfeigned.* Faith, in the Scripture sense of it, includes the whole of religious principles respecting God, and respecting Christ. Good principles, without good practice, I confess, are nothing; they are of no avail in the sight of God, nor in the estimation of wise men. But practice not founded on principle, is likely to be always unstable and wavering; and, therefore, the faith of religious principles enters, for a very considerable share, into the proper discharge of the duties of charity.

It will be admitted that, without faith, our duties towards God cannot be properly performed. You may be assured that your duties towards men will always greatly suffer from the want of it. Faith, when pure and genuine, supplies to every part of virtue, and in particular to the virtue of charity, many motives and assistances,

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of which the unbeliever is destitute. He who acts from faith, acts upon the high principle of regard to the God who hath made him, and to the Saviour who redeems him; which will often stimulate him to his duty, when other principles of benevolence become faint and languid, or are crossed by opposite interests. When he considers himself as pursuing the approbation of that divine Being, from whom love descends, a sacred enthusiasm both prompts and consecrates his charitable dispositions. Regardless of men, or of human recompence, he is carried along by a higher impulse. He acts with the spirit of a follower of the Son of God, who not only has enjoined love, but has enforced it by the example of laying down his life for mankind. Whatever he does in behalf of his fellow-creatures, he considers himself as doing, in some degree, to that divine Person, who hath said, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me* *. Hence charity is with him not only a moral virtue, but a

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* Matth. xxv. 40.



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Christian grace. It acquires additional dignity and energy from being connected with the heavenly state and the heavenly inhabitants. He mingles with beings of a higher order, while he is discharging his duty to his fellow-creatures on earth; and, by joining faith and piety to good works, he completes the character of a Christian.

THUS I have endeavoured to explain the full sense of that comprehensive view of religion which is given in the text. I have shewn in what respects *charity*, joined with *the pure heart*, *the good conscience*, *and faith unfeigned*, forms *the end of the commandment*. Let us ever keep in view those essential parts of a virtuous character, and preserve them in their proper union. Thus shall our religion rise into a regular and well proportioned edifice, where each part gives firmness and support to another. If any one of those material parts be wanting in the structure; if, out of our system of charity, either purity, or justice, or faith, be left, there will be cracks and flaws in the building which prepare its ruin.

This is indeed one of the greatest and most frequent errours of men, in their moral



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conduct. They take hold of virtue by pieces and corners only. Few are so depraved as to be without all sense of duty, and all regard to it. To some moral qualities, which appear to them amiable or estimable, almost all men lay claim; and on these they rest their worth, in their own estimation. But these scattered pieces of virtue, not uniting into one whole, nor forming a consistent character, have no powerful influence on their general habits of life. From various unguarded quarters they lie open to temptation. Their lives are full of contradiction, and perpetually fluctuate between good and evil. Virtue can neither rise to its native dignity, nor attain its proper rewards, until all its chief parts be joined together in our character, and exert an equal authority in regulating our conduct.

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# SERMON III.

## On our LIVES being in the Hand of GOD.

[Preached at the Beginning of a New Year *.]

PSALM XXXI. 15.

*My times are in thy Hand.—*

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THE sun that rolls over our heads, the food that we receive, the rest that we enjoy, daily admonish us of a superiour power, on whom the inhabitants of the earth depend for light, life, and subsistence. But as long as all things proceed in their ordinary course; when day returns after day with perfect simi-

* January 6th, 1793.

larity;

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larity; when our life seems stationary, and nothing occurs to warn us of any approaching change, the religious sentiments of dependence are apt to be forgotten. The great revolutions of time, when they come round in their stated order, have a tendency to force some impressions of piety even on the most unthinking minds. They both mark our existence on earth to be advancing towards its close, and exhibit our condition as continually changing; while each returning year brings along with it new events, and at the same time carries us forwards to the conclusion of all. We cannot, on such occasions, avoid perceiving, that their is a Supreme Being, who holds in his hands the line of our existence, and measures out to each of us our allotted portion of that line. Beyond a certain limit, we know that it cannot be extended; and long before it reach that limit, it may be cut asunder by an invisible hand, which is stretched forth over all the inhabitants of the world. Then naturally arises the ejaculation of the text, *My times, O God, are in thy hand.* "My fate depends

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" pends on thee. The duration of my " life, and all the events which in fu- " ture days are to fill it, are entirely at " thy disposal."—Let us now, when we have just seen one year close, and another begin, meditate seriously on this sentiment. Let us consider what is implied in *our times being in the hand of God*; and to what improvement this meditation leads.

THE text evidently implies, first, that *our times* are not in our own hand; that, as our continuance in life depends not on ourselves, so the events which are to happen while life remains, are unknown to us, and not under our own direction. Of this we may behold many a proof when we look back on the transactions of the year which is just finished. Recollection will readily present to us a busy period, filled up with a mixture of business and amusement, of anxieties and cares, of joys and sorrows. We have talked, perhaps, and acted much. We have formed many a plan; in public or in private life, we have been engaged

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gaged in a variety of pursuits. Let me now ask, how small a proportion of all that has happened could have been foreseen, or foretold by us? How many things have occurred, of which we had no expectation; some, perhaps, that have succeeded beyond our hopes; many, also, that have befallen us contrary to our wish? How often were each of us admonished that there are secret wheels, which, unseen by us, bring about the revolutions of human affairs; and that, while man was devising his way, Providence was directing the event?

That scene is now closed. The tale of that year has been told. We look forward to the year which is beginning; and what do we behold there?—All, my brethren, is a blank to our view: A dark unknown presents itself. We are entering on an untried, undiscovered country, where, as each succeeding month comes forward, new scenes may open; new objects may engage our attention; changes at home or abroad, in public or in private affairs, may alter the whole state of our fortune. New connections may

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may be at hand to be formed, or old ones just about to be dissolved; perhaps, we may have little more to do with this world, or with any of its connections; we may be standing on the verge of time and life, and on the point of passing into a new region of existence. In short the prospect before us is full of awful uncertainty. Life and death, prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, joy and trouble, lie in one undistinguishable mass, where our eye can descry nothing through the obscurity that wraps them up.

While it is thus certain that *our times* are not at our own disposal, we are taught by the text, that they are *in the hand of God.* This may be considered in two views. Our times are in the hand of God, as a supreme Disposer of events. They are in the hand of God, as a Guardian and a Father.

*Our times*, I say, *are in the hand of God* as a supreme irresistible Ruler. All that is to happen to us in this and the succeeding years of our life,—if any succeeding

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ceeding years we shall be allowed to see,— has been foreknown and arranged by God. The first view under which human affairs present themselves to us, is that of confused and irregular succession. The events of the world seem thrown together by chance, like the billows of the sea, tumbling and tossing over each other, without rule or order. All that is apparent to us, is the fluctuation of human caprice, and the operation of human passions. We see the strife of ambition, and the efforts of stratagem, labouring to accomplish their several purposes among the societies of men. But it is no more than the surface, the outside of things that we behold. Higher counsels, than it is in our power to trace, are concerned in the transactions of the world. If we believe in God at all, as the Governor of the universe, we must believe that, without his providence, nothing happens on earth. He over-rules, at his pleasure, the passions of men. He bends all their designs into subserviency to his decree. *He makes the wrath of man to praise him*; and *restrains*, in what mea-



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sure he thinks fit, *the remainder of wrath* *. He brings forth in their course all the generations of men. When the time is come for their entering into light, they appear on the stage; and when the time fixed for their dismission arrives, he *changes their countenance*, and sends them away. The time of our appearing is now come, after our ancestors had left their place, and gone down to the dust. We are at present permitted to act our part freely and without constraint. No violence is done to our inclination or choice. But assuredly there is not a day of our life, nor an event in that day, but was foreseen by God. That succession of occurrences, which to us is full of obscurity and darkness is all light and order in his view. He sees, from the beginning to the end; and brings forward every thing that happens in its due time and place.

*Our times are* altogether *in his hand.* Let us take notice, that they are not in the hands either of our enemies, or of our friends. It is not in the power of

* Pfalm lxxvi. 10.

man

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man to shorten or to prolong our life, more or less than God has decreed. Enemies may employ craft or violence in their attacks; friends may employ skill and vigilance for the preservation of our health and safety; but both the one and the other can have effect only as far as God permits. They work in subserviency to his purpose. By him they are held in invisible bonds. To the exertions of all human agents he says, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.* SERMON III.

We are to observe next, that *our times are in the hand of God*, not only as an almighty Disposer, but as a merciful Guardian and Father. We are by no means to imagine, that from race to race and from year to year, God sports with the lives of succeeding generations of men, or in the mere wantonness of arbitrary power, brings them forth, and sends them away. No; if we have any confidence in what either the light of Nature suggests to all men, or what the revelation of the Gospel has confirmed to Christians,

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Christians, we have full ground to believe that the administration of human affairs is conducted with infinite wisdom and goodness. The counsels of the Almighty are indeed too deep for our limited understandings to trace. *His path* may often, as to us, be *in the sea, and his footsteps in the mighty waters*; while, nevertheless *all his paths are mercy and truth.* He who, from the benignity of his nature, erected this world for the abode of men; He who furnished it so richly for our accommodation, and stored it with so much beauty for our entertainment; He who, since first we entered into life, hath followed us with such a variety of mercies, surely can have no pleasure in our disappointment and distress. *He knows our frame; He remembers we are dust*; and looks to frail man, we are assured, with *such pity as a father beareth to his children* *. To him we may safely commit ourselves, and all our concerns, as to one who is best qualified, both to direct the incidents proper to

* Pſalm ciii. 13, 14.

happen

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happen to us in this world, and to judge of the time when it is fit for us to be removed from it. SERMON III.

Even that ignorance of our future destiny in life, of which we sometimes complain, is a signal proof of his goodness. He hides from us the view of futurity, because the view would be dangerous and overpowering. It would either dispirit us with visions of terror, or intoxicate us by the disclosure of success. The veil which covers from our sight the events of this and of succeeding years, is a veil woven by the hand of mercy. Our *times are in his hand*; and we have reason to be glad that in his hand they are kept, shut out from our view. Submit to his pleasure as an almighty Ruler we must, because we cannot resist him. Equal reason there is for trusting in him as a Guardian, under whose disposal we are safe.

Such is the import of the text, that *our times are in the hand of God.* Our times are unknown to us, and not under our own direction. They are in the



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hands of God as a Governor and Ruler; in the hands of God as a Guardian and Father. These separate views of the text require on our part, separate improvements.

SEEING our times are not in our own hand, seeing futurity is unknown to us, let us, first, check the vain curiosity of penetrating into what is to come. Conjecture about futurity we often must; but upon all conjectures of what this year is to produce, let us lay a proper restraint. Let us wait till God shall bring forward events in their proper course, without wishing to discover what he has concealed; lest, if the discovery were granted, we should see many things which we would wish not to have seen.

The most common propensity of mankind is to store futurity with whatever is agreeable to them; especially in those periods of life when imagination is lively, and hope is ardent. Looking forward to the year now beginning, they are ready to promise themselves much from the foundations of prosperity which they

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they have laid; from the friendships and connections which they have secured; from the plans of conduct which they have formed. Alas! how deceitful do all these dreams of happiness often prove! While many are saying in secret to their hearts, *To-morrow shall be as this day and more abundantly*, we are obliged in return to say to them, *Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* I do not mean that in the unknown prospect which lies before us, we should forbode to ourselves nothing but misfortunes.—May it be the pleasure of Heaven that this year run on in a placid and tranquil tenor to us all!— But this I say, that in such foresight of futurity as we are allowed to take, we may reckon upon it as certain, that this year shall prove to us, as many past have proved, a checquered scene of some comforts and some troubles. In what proportion one or other of these shall prevail in it; whether, when it ends, it shall leave with us the memory of joys or of sorrows, is to be determined by him in whose hands *our times are.* Our wis-

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dom is to be prepared for whatever the year is to bring; prepared to receive comforts with thankfulness, troubles with fortitude; and to improve both for the great purposes of virtue and eternal life.

ANOTHER important instruction which naturally arises from our times not being in our own hands is, that we ought no longer to trifle with what it is not in our power to prolong: but that we should make haste to live as wise men; not delaying till to-morrow what may be done to-day; *doing now with all our might whatever our hand findeth to do*; before that *night cometh wherein no man can work.*

Amidst the uncertainty of the events which are before us, there is one thing we have too much reason to believe, namely, that of us who are now assembled in this congregation, and who have seen the year begin, there are some who shall not survive to see it close. Whether it shall be you, or you, or I, who shall be gathered to our fathers before the revolving year has finished its round, God alone knows. *Our times are in his*



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*hand!*—But to our place, it is more than probable that some of us shall have gone. Could we foretel the month, or the day, on which our change was to happen, how diligent would we be in setting our house in order, and preparing ourselves to appear before our Maker? Surely, that ought to be prepared for with most care, concerning which we are ignorant how soon it is to take place. Let us therefore *walk circumspectly*, and redeem *the time*. Let us dismiss those trivial and superfluous cares which burden or corrupt our life, in order to attend to what is of highest importance to us as men and Christians. The beginning of each year should carry to us all a solemn admonition of our folly in neglecting to improve suitably the years that are past. It should call up mispent time into our view; and be like the hand coming forth upon the wall, in the days of Belshazzar, and writing in legible characters over against us, "O man! "thy days are numbered; thou art weighed "in the balance, and found wanting; take "care lest thy kingdom be on the point of "departing from thee."

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WHEN we consider, in the next place, that our times, as I before illustrated, are in the hand of God as a sovereign Disposer, it is an obvious inference from this truth, that we should prepare ourselves to submit patiently to his pleasure, both as to the events which are to fill up our days, and as to the time of our continuing in this world. To contend with him we know to be fruitless. The word that is gone out of his mouth must stand. In the path which he has marked out for us, whether it be short or long, rugged or smooth, we must walk. Is it not then the dictate of wisdom, that we should previously reconcile ourselves to this sovereign ordination, and bring our minds to harmonize with what is appointed to be our destiny? Let us mortify this temper, by recalling that reflection of the wise man; *who knoweth what is good for man in this life; all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow* *?

To enjoy long life, and see many days, is the universal wish; and, as the wish is prompted by nature, it cannot be in itself unlawful. At the same time, several

* Eccles. vi. 12.

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circumstances concur to temper the eagerness of this wish; and to shew us that it should always be formed under due submission to the wiser judgment of Heaven. Who among us can tell whether, in wishing for the continuance of many years on earth, we may not be only wishing for a prolongation of distress and misery?—*You* might live, my friends, till you had undergone lingering rounds of severe pain, from which death would have proved a seasonable deliverance. You might live till your breasts were pierced with many a wound from public calamities or private sorrows. You might live till you beheld the death of all whom you had loved; till you survived all those who love you; till you were left as desolate strangers on earth in the midst of a new race, who neither knew you, nor cared for you, but who wished you off the stage.—Of a nature so ambiguous are all the prospects which life sets before us, that in every wish we form relating to them, much reason we have to be satisfied that our times are in the hands of God, rather than our own. SERMON III.



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THIS consideration is greatly strengthened, when, in the last place, we think of God acting, not as a Sovereign only, but as a guardian, in the disposal of our times. This is our great consolation in looking forward to futurity. To God as a wise Ruler, calm submission is due; but it is more than submission that belongs to him as a merciful father; it is the spirit of cordial and affectionate consent to his will. Unknown to us as the times to come are, it should be sufficient to our full repose that they are known to God. The day and the hour which are fixed in his counsels for our dismission from life, we ought to be persuaded are fixed for the best; and that any longer we should not wish to remain.

When we see that last hour drawing nigh, though our spirits may be composed on our own account, yet, on account of our friends and families, no little anxiety and sorrow may be sometimes apt to take possession of the mind. Long we have enjoyed the comfort of their society, and been accustomed to consider them as parts of ourselves. To be parted from them for ever

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ever is, at any rate, a bitter thought; but to the bitterness of this, is over and above added the apprehension of their suffering much by our death. We leave many a relation, perhaps may leave young children, and a helpless family, behind us, to be exposed to various dangers, and thrown forth on an unfriendly world. Such virtuous anxieties often oppress the tender and feeling heart at the closing periods of life.—My brethren, look up to that God, in whose hand *the times* of your fathers were; in whose hand *the times* of your posterity shall be. Recollect, for your comfort, the experience of ages. When were the righteous utterly forsaken by God in times past? Why should they be forsaken by him in times to come? Well did he govern the world before you had a being in it: Well shall he continue to govern it after you are no more. No cause have you, therefore, to oppress your minds with the load of unknown futurity. Commit your cares to a father in heaven. Surrender your life, your friends, and your family, to that God who hath said, *The children of his servants shall continue, and their*

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*their seed shall be established before him* *.—*Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me* †.

I HAVE thus shewn what the import is, and what the improvement should be, of the doctrine of the text, that *our times are in the hand of God.* It asserts a fact, the truth of which can be called in question by none; a fact which, whether persons have any sentiments of religion or not, is calculated to make a serious impression on every mind; especially at seasons when the revolution of years gives us warning that our duration on earth is measured, and advances towards its period. To persons who are religiously disposed, who study to improve life to its proper purposes, to do their duty towards God and man, and through the merits of their Redeemer to obtain grace and favour from Heaven, the doctrine of the text is still more important. Among them it tends to awaken impressions which are not only serious, but, as I

* Psalm cii. 28. † Jeremiah, xlix. 11.

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have shewn, salutary and comforting to the heart.—Thankful that our times are in the hand of a Sovereign, who is both wise and gracious, let us prepare ourselves to meet the approaching events of life with becoming resignation, and at the same time with manly constancy and firm trust in God. As long as it shall please him to continue our abode in the world, let us remain faithful to our duty; and when it shall please him to give the command for our removal hence, let us utter only this voice: "In "thy hand, O my God, *my times are.* "Thou art calling me away. Here I "am ready to obey thy call, and at thy "signal to go forth. I thank thee that "I have been admitted to partake so "long of the comforts of life, and to "be a spectator of the wisdom and good-"ness displayed in thy works. I thank "thee that thou hast borne so long with "my infirmities and provocations; hast "allowed me to look up to thy promises "in the gospel, and to hear the words "of eternal life uttered by my great Re-"deemer. With gratitude, faith, and "hope,

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" hope, I commit my soul to thee. *Lord,* " *now lettest thou thy servant depart in* " *peace; for mine eyes have seen thy sal-* " *vation.*"—Such are the sentiments with which every pious and good man should conclude his life. Such indeed are the sentiments which he ought to carry through every part of life. With these may we begin, and with these conclude, every succeeding year which God shall think fit to add to our earthly existence.

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# SERMON IV.

## On the Mixture of BAD MEN with the GOOD in HUMAN SOCIETY.

MATTH. xiii. 30.

*Let both grow together until the harvest.*—

THE parable of which these words are a part, contains a prophetical description of the state of the church. Our Lord predicts that the societies of Christians were to be infected with persons of loose principles and bad dispositions, whom he likens to *tares* springing up among *wheat*. He intimates that there should arise some whose officious zeal would prompt the desire of exterminating im-



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immediately all such evil men; but that this were contrary to the designs of Providence, and to the spirit of Christianity; that a complete separation was indeed to be made at last between the good and the bad; but that this separation was to be delayed till the end of the world, when, in the style of the parable, the *tares* should be entirely *gathered out from among the wheat. Let both grow together until the harvest.*

When we look around us, nothing is more conspicuous in the state of the world than that broad mixture of the religious and the impious, the virtuous and the wicked, which we find taking place in every society. Strong objections seem hence to arise against either the wisdom or goodness of divine Providence; especially when we behold bad men not only tolerated in the world, but occasionally exalted in their circumstances, to the depression of the just. Why, it will be said, if a Supreme Being exist, and if his justice rule the universe, does he allow such infamous persons as the records of history often present, to have a place, and

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and even to make a figure in his world? Why sleeps the thunder idle in his hand, when it could so easily blast them? What shall we think of one who, having the power of exterminating them always at his command, permits them to proceed without disturbance; nay, sometimes appears to look on them with complacency?—It becomes highly worthy of our attention to consider what answer can be made to these objections; to inquire whether any reasons can be given that serve to justify this dispensation of Providence, in allowing a mixture of bad men to continue on the face of the earth until the end of time. This inquiry shall make the subject of the present discourse, together with such reflections as naturally arise from surveying the state of human affairs. SERMON IV.

BUT, before entering directly on such inquiry, it may be proper to take notice, that in our estimation of who are the good, who are the bad, we are often in hazard of committing mistakes. The real characters of men are known only to

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to God. They frequently depend on the secret and unseen parts of life. As in judging of themselves men are always partial, so in judging of others they often err, through the imperfect information which they have gathered, or the rash prejudices which they have formed. They are too apt to limit the character of virtue to those who agree with them in sentiment and belief; and to exaggerate the failings of those against whom they have conceived dislike, into great and unpardonable crimes. Were it left to the indiscreet zeal of some to extirpate from the earth all those whom they consider as bad men, there is ground to apprehend that, instead of tares the wheat would often be rooted out.—At the same time we readily admit the fact, as too manifest to be denied, that a multitude of gross and notorious sinners are now mixed with the followers of God and virtue. Let us proceed then to consider how far this is consistent with the justice and wisdom of the Governor of the world.



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IT is a principle in which all serious and reflecting persons have agreed, and which by many arguments is confirmed, that our present state on earth is designed to be a state of discipline and improvement, in order to fit human nature for a higher and better state which it is to attain hereafter. Now, this principle being once admitted, we say, that the mixture of virtue and vice which here prevails, is calculated to answer this purpose better than a more unmixed and perfect state of society would have done.

FOR, in the first place, the crimes of the wicked give occasion to the exercise of many excellent dispositions of heart among the righteous. They bring forth all the suffering virtues, which otherwise would have had no field; and by the exercise of which the human character is tried, and acquires some of its chief honours. Were there no bad men in the world to vex and distress the good, the good might appear in the light of harmless innocence; but could have no opportunity of displaying fidelity, magnanimity, patience, and fortitude. One half



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of virtue, and not the least important half, would be lost to the world. In our present imperfect state, any virtue which is never exercised is in hazard of becoming extinct in the human breast. If goodness constantly proceeded in a smooth and flowery path; if, meeting with no adversary to oppose it, it were surrounded on every hand with acclamation and praise, is there no ground to dread that it might be corrupted by vanity, or might sink into indolence? This dangerous calm must therefore be interrupted. The waters must be troubled, lest they should stagnate and putrify. When you behold wicked men multiplying in number, and increasing in power, imagine not that Providence particularly favours them. No; they are suffered for a time to prosper, that they may fulfil the high designs of Heaven. They are employed as instruments in the hand of God for the improvement of his servants. They are the rods with which he chastens the virtuous, in order to rouse them from a dangerous slumber; to form them for the day of adversity, and to teach them how to suffer honourably.

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In the next place, the mixture of the bad among the good serves not only to give exercise to the passive graces, but also to improve the active powers and virtues of man. It inures the righteous to vigilance and exertion. It obliges them to stand forth, and act their part with firmness and constancy in evil times. It gives occasion for their virtues to shine with conspicuous lustre; and makes them appear as *the lights of the world* amidst surrounding darkness. Were it not for the dangers that arise from abounding iniquity, there would be no opportunity for courage to act, for wisdom to admonish, for caution to watch, nor for faith to exert itself in *overcoming the world.* It is that mixture of dispositions which now takes place, that renders the theatre on which we act so busy and stirring, and so much fitted for giving employment to every part of man's intelligent and moral nature. It affords a complete field for the genuine display of characters; and gives every man the opportunity to come forth and show what he is. Were the tenour of human conduct altogether regular and uni-



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form, interrupted by no follies and vices, no cross dispositions and irregular passions, many of our active powers would find no exercise. Perhaps even our life would languish, and become too still and insipid. Man is not yet ripe for a paradise of innocence, and for the enjoyment of a perfect and faultless society. As in the natural world, he is not made for perpetual spring and cloudless skies, but by the wintry storm must be called to exert his abilities for procuring shelter and defence; so in the moral world, the intermixture of bad men renders many an exertion necessary, which in a more perfect state of the world would find no place, but which in the present state of trial is proper and useful.——The existence of vice in the world assuredly testifies our present corruption; and, according to the degree of its prevalence, is always, more or less, the source of misery. It is a standing proof of the fall and degeneracy of man. But as long as that fallen state continues, the wisdom of Providence eminently appears in making the errours and frailties of the wicked subservient to the improvement

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ment of the just. *Tares* are for that reason suffered at present to grow up *among the wheat.* SERMON IV.

THESE observations on the wisdom of Providence in this dispensation will be farther illustrated, by considering the useful instructions which we receive, or which at least every wise man may receive, from the follies and vices of those among whom we are obliged to live.

*First*, They furnish instruction concerning the snares and dangers against which we ought to be most on our guard. They put it thereby in our power to profit by the errours and misconduct of others. By observing from what small beginnings the greatest crimes have arisen; observing how bad company has seduced this man from his original principles and habits; how a careless indulgence of pleasure has blinded and intoxicated that man; how the neglect of divine institutions has, in another, gradually paved the way for open profligacy; much salutary instruction is conveyed to the virtuous. Tracing the dangerous and slippery paths by which



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so many have been insensibly betrayed into ruin, their views of human nature are enlarged; the sense of their own imbecility is strongly impressed upon them; accompanied with the conviction of the necessity of a constant dependence on the grace and assistance of Heaven. All the crimes, which they behold disturbing society around them, serve as signals hung out to them, beacons planted in their view, to prevent their making shipwreck among those rocks on which others have split. It has been justly said, that not only from the advices of his friends, but from the reproaches of his enemies, a wise man may draw instruction. In the same manner, it is not only by the examples of good men, but likewise by those of the wicked, that an attentive mind may be confirmed in virtue.

*Next*, THESE examples of bad men, while they admonish the virtuous of the dangers against which they are to guard, are farther profitable by the views which they exhibit of the evil and the deformity of sin. Its odious nature never appears

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pears in so strong a light as when dis- SERMON IV.
played in the crimes of the wicked. It is
true that when vice is carried only to a
certain degree, and disguised by plausible
colours, it may pass unreproved, and
even for a while seem popular in the
world. But it is no less true that, when
it becomes open and flagrant, and is de-
prived of the shadow of virtue, it never
fails to incur general reproach, and to
become the object either of contempt or
of hatred. How often, for instance, have
the greatest abilities which once drew
esteem and admiration, sunk, in a short
time, into the most humiliating degrada-
tion, merely through the ascendant which
corrupted inclinations and low habits had
acquired over their possessor? How often
have the rising honours of the young
been blasted, by their forsaking the path
of honour on which they had once en-
tered, for the blind and crooked tracks of
depravity and folly? Such spectacles of
the infamy of vice, such memorials of
the disgrace attending it, are permitted
by Providence for general instruction;
and assuredly are edifying to the world.



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It was necessary for moral improvement, that the beauty and excellence of virtue, and the deformity of vice, should be strongly impressed on every intelligent mind. This could never be done with so great advantage as by the striking contrasts of both, which are produced by the living examples of evil men intermixed with the good. It is in this mirror that we clearly contemplate how much the *righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*.

THE same purpose of important instruction is farther promoted by the instances of misery which the state of wicked men on earth affords. I admit that the worldly success which sometimes attends them may blind and seduce the unwary; but a little more reflection enables men to distinguish between apparent success and real happiness. The condition of worthless men, whatever splendour riches may throw around them, is easily discerned to be a restless and miserable one; and the misery which they suffer, to be derived from their vices. In that

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that great corrupted crowd which surrounds us, what incessant bustle and stir, what agitation and tumult take place? What envy and jealousy of one another? How much bitterness of resentment do we behold among them; mutually deceiving and deceived; supplanting and supplanted; ever pursuing, but never satisfied? These are not matters of rare observation, or which require nice scrutiny to discover them. We need only open our eyes to behold the wicked tormented by their passions, and far removed from that sanctuary of calmness and tranquillity which is the abode of real happiness. Nay, when we appeal to bad men themselves, after they have run the whole round of vicious pleasures, we will often find them obliged to confess that the wretched result of their pursuits has been *vanity and vexation of spirit*; and that the happiest days they have enjoyed were in the times of innocence, before criminal desires and guilty passions had taken possession of their breasts. Such practical demonstrations as these, of the infelicity of sin, are yielded by the examples

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ples of evil-doers whom we see around us. By attending to their situation, the misery, as well as infamy, of guilt is realised, and rendered sensible to our apprehension.

THUS, upon a fair inquiry, you behold how the ways of God may, in this remarkable case, be justified to man. You behold what important ends are advanced, by permitting *the tares* at present to *grow together with the wheat*. The intermixture of evil men in human society serves to exercise the suffering graces and virtues of the good; by the diversity of characters among those with whom they have intercourse, it serves to bring forth and improve their active powers and virtues, and to enlarge the circle of useful occupations; it serves to instruct them in the temptations against which they are to guard, to reveal to them all the deformity of vice, and to make its miseries pass conspicuously before their eyes. When we consider them as actors on the theatre of the world, they are thereby improved in the part they have

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have to perform. When we consider them as spectators of what is passing on that theatre, their minds are thereby instructed; their views rectified and enlarged by the objects that are set before them. SERMON IV.

FROM these important truths, several reflections no less important arise.

We are naturally taught, in the first place, never to be hasty in finding fault with any of the arrangements of Providence. The present permission of moral evil on the earth seemed, on the first view, to furnish a strong objection against either the wisdom or the goodness of the Author of nature. After beholding the useful purposes which are answered by that permission, how cautious should we be in advancing any of our rash speculations against his government and conduct! To our confined and humble station it belongs not to censure, but to submit, trust, and adore; satisfied that the farther we inquire, the rectitude of his ways will appear the more; thankful for the discoveries of them which have been imparted

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to us; and persuaded that, where our discoveries fail, it is not because there is no more wisdom or goodness to be seen, but because our present condition allows us not to see more.

In the second place, let us be taught with what eye we are to look upon those bad men whom we find around us in the world. Not surely with an eye of envy. Whatever prosperity they may seem to enjoy, they are still no more than *tares*, the weeds of the field; contemptible in the sight of God, tolerated by his providence for a while on account of the righteous, to whose improvement they are rendered subservient. The parable informs us that, in the end, they are to be *gathered together and burnt*. In this life only they have *their good things*. But their prosperity is transitory. *They are brought into desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrours. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O God, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image* *.—When we consider their unhappy state, it

* Psalm lxxiii. 19, 20.

becomes

becomes us to behold them with the eye of pity. Let us remember that, in the midst of their errours, they are by nature still our brethren. Let us not behave to them in the spirit of bitterness. Insult not their follies. Pride not yourselves on superiour virtue. Remember that, as bad men are mixed with the good, so, in the best men, vices are at present mixed with virtues. Your own character, good as you may esteem it, is not free from every evil taint; and in the characters of those whom you reprobate as vitious, there are always some good qualities mixed with the bad ones. Study, as far as you can, to reclaim and amend them; and if, in any degree, you have been profited by their failings, endeavour, in return, to profit them by good counsel and advice; by advice not administered with officious zeal, or self-conceited superiority, but with the tenderness of compassion and real friendship.

In the third place, in whatever proportion the admixture of vice may seem to take place in the world, let us never



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SERMON IV. despair of the prevalence of virtue on the whole. Let us not exaggerate, beyond measure, the quantity of vice that is found in the mixture. It is proper to observe, that in the parable now before us, after the owner of the field had *sown his good seed*, no reason is given us to think, that the good seed was entirely choked up by *tares*. On the contrary, we are told that *the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit*; and, though the *tares* also arose, yet, in the end, there was a *harvest*, when the *wheat was reaped and gathered into the barn*. In the most corrupted times, God never leaves himself without many witnesses on earth. He is always attentive to the cause of goodness; and frequently supports and advances it by means which we are unable to trace. He nourishes much piety and virtue in hearts that are unknown to us; and beholds repentance ready to spring up among many whom we consider as reprobates.—I know that it has always been common for persons to represent the age in which they live as the worst that ever appeared; and religion and virtue as just on the point of



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vanishing from among men. This is the language sometimes of the serious; often of the hypocritical, or of the narrow-minded. But true religion gives no sanction to such severe censures, or such gloomy views. Though the *tares* must be at all times springing up, there is no reason for believing that they shall ever overspread the whole field. The nature of the weeds that spring up may vary, according to the nature of the soil. Different modes of iniquity may distinguish different ages of the world; while the sum of corruption is nearly the same. Let not our judgments of men, and of the times in which we live, be hasty and presumptuous. Let us trust in the grace of God, and hope the best of mankind.

In the fourth and last place, let us keep our eyes ever fixed on that important period, which is alluded to in the Text, as the conclusion of all. *Let both grow together until the harvest.* The great spiritual year is to be closed by *a harvest*, when *the householder is to gather the wheat into his barn*; when, at the end of the world,

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world, the final distinction of men and characters is to take place. The confused mixture of good and evil, which now prevails, is only a temporary dispensation of Providence, accommodated to man's fallen and imperfect state. Let it not tempt us for a moment to distrust the reality of the Divine government; or to entertain the remotest suspicion that moral good and evil are to be on the same terms for ever. The frailties of our nature fitted us for no more at present than the enjoyment of a very mixed and imperfect society. But when our nature, purified and refined, shall become ripe for higher advancement, then shall the spirits of the just, disengaged from any polluted mixture, undisturbed by sin or by sinners, be united in one divine assembly, and rejoice for ever in the presence of him who made them. Looking forward to this glorious issue with stedfast faith, let no cross appearances ever discomfit our hopes, or lead us to suspect that we have been serving God in vain. If we continue *faithful to the death*, we may rest assured, that in due time we shall *receive the crown of life*.

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# SERMON V.

## On the RELIEF which the GOSPEL affords to the DISTRESSED.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

MATTH. xi. 28.

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

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THE life of man on earth is doomed to be clouded with various evils. Throughout all ranks the afflicted form a considerable portion of the human race; and even they who have a title to be called prosperous, are always, in some periods of their life, obliged to drink from the cup of bitterness. The Christian religion is particularly entitled to our regard, by accommodating itself with



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great tenderness to this distressed condition of mankind. It is not to be considered as merely an authoritative system of precepts. Important precepts it indeed delivers for the wise and proper regulation of life. But the same voice which enjoins our duty, utters the words of consolation. The Gospel deserves to be held a dispensation of relief to mankind under both the temporal and spiritual distresses of their state.

This amiable and compassionate spirit of our religion conspicuously appears in the character of its great Author. It shone in all his actions while he lived on earth. It breathed in all his discourses; and, in the words of the text, is expressed with much energy. In the preceding verse, he had given a high account of his own person and dignity. *All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* But, lest any of his hearers should be discouraged by this mysterious representation of his greatness, he instantly

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ly tempers it with the most gracious be- SERMON V.
nignity; declaring, in the text, the merciful intention of his mission to the world. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

THE first thing which claims our attention in these words is, what we are to understand by *coming unto Christ*. This is a phrase which has often given occasion to controversy. By theological writers it has been involved in much needless mystery, while the meaning is in itself plain and easy. The very metaphor that is here used serves to explain it. In the ancient world, disciples flocked round their different teachers, and attended them wherever they went; in order both to testify their attachment, and to imbibe more fully the doctrine of their masters. *Coming unto Christ*, therefore, is the same with resorting to him as our declared Master; acknowledging ourselves his disciples, believers in his doctrine, and followers of his precepts. As Christ is made known to us under the character both of



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a Teacher and a Saviour, our *coming to him* imports not only submission to his instructions, but confidence also in his power to save. It imports that, forsaking the corruptions of sin and the world, we follow that course of virtue and obedience which he points out to us; relying on his mediation of pardon of our offences, and acceptance with heaven. This is what is implied in the scripture term *Faith*; which includes both the assent of the understanding to the truth of the Christian religion, and the concurrence of the will in receiving it.

WHAT next occurs in the text to attract our notice, is the description of those to whom the invitation is addressed. All those who *labour and are heavy laden*, that is, who, in one way or other, feel themselves grieved and distressed, are here invited to come to Christ.—Now, from two sources chiefly our distresses arise, from moral, or from natural causes.

*First*, THEY may arise from inward moral causes; from certain feelings and



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reflections of the mind, which occasion uneasiness and pain. A course of sin and vice always proves ruinous and destructive in the issue. But its tendency to ruin is often not perceived, while that tendency is advancing. For, as sin is the reign of passion and pleasure, it forms men to a thoughtless inconsiderate state. Circumstances, however, may occur, and frequently, in the course of life, do occur, which disclose to a vicious man the ruin which he is bringing on himself, as an offender against the God who made him. When some occasional confinement to solitude, or some turn of adverse fortune, directs his attention immediately upon his own character; or when, drawing towards the close of life, his passions subside, his pleasures withdraw, and a future state comes forward to his view; in such situations it often happens, that the past follies and crimes of such a man appear to him in a light most odious and shocking; and not odious only, but terrifying to his heart. He considers that he is undoubtedly placed under the government of a just God, who did not send him into this world



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for nought; that he has neglected the part assigned to him; has contemned the laws of Heaven; has degraded his own nature; and instead of being useful, having been hurtful and pernicious to those among whom he lived, is about to leave a detestable memory behind him.—What account shall he give of himself to his Maker? Self-condemned, polluted by so many crimes, how can he expect to find mercy in his sight?—Hence, an overwhelmed and dejected mind; hence, dismal forebodings of punishment; hence, that *wounded spirit*, which, when it is deeply pierced, becomes the sorest of all human evils, and has sometimes rendered existence a burden which could not be endured.

Such distresses as these, arising from moral internal causes, may be made light of by the giddy and the vain; and represented as confined to a few persons only of distempered imagination. But to those whose professions give them occasion to see men under various circumstances of affliction, they are known to be far from being unfrequent in the world; and, on many more oscasions than is commonly imagined,

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imagined, to throw over the human mind the blackest gloom of which it is susceptible. Religious feelings, be assured, have a deep root in the nature of man. They form a part of the human constitution. They are interwoven with many of those fears and hopes which actuate us in the changing situations of fortune. During the gay and active periods of life, they may be smothered; but with most men, they are smothered rather than totally obliterated: And if any crisis of our condition shall awaken, and bring them forth, in their full force, upon a conscious guilty heart, woe to the man, who, in some disconsolate season, is doomed to suffer their extreme vengeance!

But, while under such distresses of the mind, not a few may be said *to labour and to be heavy laden*, greater still is the multitude of those who, from natural external causes, from the calamities and evils of life, undergo much suffering and misery. The life of man is not indeed wholly composed of misery. It admits of many pleasing scenes. On the whole,



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there is reason to believe that it affords more joy than grief. At the same time, the unfortunate, as I before observed, form always a numerous class of mankind; and it may be said with truth, that *sore travel is ordained for the sons of men.* Though the burden is not equally laid on all; some there always are, on whom it falls with oppressive weight.—Unexpected disappointments have crushed their hopes, and blasted the plans which they had formed for comfort in the world. The world had, perhaps, smiled upon them once, only to give them a sharper feeling of its miseries at the last. Struggling with poverty, unable to support their families whom they see languishing around them, they, at the same time, are obliged, by their situation in society, to conceal their necessities; and, under the forced appearance of cheerfulness, to hide from the world a broken heart. They are stung, perhaps, by the unkindness of friends; cast off by those in whom they had trusted; or torn by untimely death from real friends, in connection with whom they might have flourished and been

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been happy; at the same time borne down, it may be, with the infirmities of a sickly body, and left to drag a painful life without assistance or relief.—How many sad scenes of this nature, on which it were painful to insist, does the world afford?

When we turn to those who are accounted prosperous men, we shall always find many sorrows mingled with their pleasures; many hours of care and vexation, wherein they acknowledge themselves classed with those who *labour and are heavy laden.* In entering into some gay festive assembly, we behold affected cheerfulness displayed on every countenance; and might fancy that we had arrived at the temple of unmixed pleasure, and gladness of heart. Yet, even there, could we look into the bosoms of these apparently happy persons, how often would we find them inwardly preyed upon by some tormenting suspicions, some anxious fears, some secret griefs, which either they dare not disclose to the world, or from which, if disclosed, they can look for no relief; in short, amidst that great company of pilgrims, who

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who are journeying through life, many there are whose journey lies through a valley of tears; and many to whom that valley is only cheered by transient glimpses of joy.

To these classes of mankind is addressed the invitation of the text. To them it is in a particular manner addressed; overlooking the giddy and dissipated multitude. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.* Not as if our Saviour were always ready to accept that sort of piety which is merely the consequence of distress; or made all those welcome, who are driven by nothing but fear or danger to have recourse to him. His words are to be understood as intimating, that the heart which is humbled and softened by affliction, is the object of his compassionate regard; that he will not reject us merely because we have been cast off by the world; but that, if with proper dispositions and sentiments we apply to him in the evil day, we shall be sure of meeting with a gracious reception. It now remains to show, what that reception is which we may look

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look for; what that *rest* is which Christ hath promised to confer on those who *come to him*; whether their distress arise from moral or from natural causes. *Come unto me, and I will give you rest.* SERMON V.

I. CHRIST affords rest to the disturbed mind that labours under apprehensions and fears of guilt. Let those who suffer distress of this nature *come to Christ*, that is, with contrition and repentance, have recourse to him as their Saviour, and they shall regain quietness and peace. Foolish and guilty they have been, and justly lie under dread of punishment; but the penitent sorrow which they now feel implies their disposition to be changed. It implies, as far as it is genuine, that, sensible of their folly, they now desire to become good and wise; and are determined for the future to hold a virtuous course, could they only hope to obtain pardon for the past. In this situation of mind, let them not be cast down and despair. Christ has brought with him from heaven the olive-branch. He carries in his hand the signal of forgiveness. The declaration which he publishes



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is, *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon* *. Insufficient though our own repentance be, to procure pardon from Heaven, we are informed, that an all-sufficient atonement has been made by Christ. Neither the number nor the atrocity of offences excludes from forgiveness, the penitent who returns to his duty. To all who come under this description, the offer of mercy extends, without exception. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things* †?

This discovery of divine government, afforded by the Gospel, is perfectly calculated to scatter the gloom which had overcast the desponding heart. The atmosphere clears up on every side; and is illuminated by cheering rays of celestial mercy. Not only is hope given to the penitent, but it is rendered sinful not to indulge that hope. We are not only al-

* Isaiah, lv. 7. † Rom. viii. 32.

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lowed and encouraged, but we are commanded to trust in the divine clemency. We are commanded to believe that *none who come unto Christ he will in any wise cast out* *. *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel*† *?*——Such is the relief which the religion of Christ brings to them who *labour and are heavy laden* under the impressions of guilt and divine displeasure; a relief which nothing can render ineffectual to the heart, except the most gloomy superstition, founded on gross misconceptions of the nature and attributes of God.— Let us now, SERMON V.

II. CONSIDER what *rest* the religion of Christ gives to them whose distress arises not from inward and moral, but from natural and external causes; from adverse fortune, or any of those numerous calamities to which we are at present exposed. To such persons it may seem

* John, vi. 37. † Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

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more difficult to promise any effectual relief. In the former case, the distress lay entirely in the mind. As soon as its views are rectified, and its apprehensions quieted, the evil is removed, and the cure effected. Here, the distress arises from without; and the religion of Christ affects not the course of external events. But though it removes not all the evils of life; though it promises no continuance of undisturbed prosperity (which indeed it were not salutary for man always to enjoy); yet, if it mitigates the evils which necessarily belong to our state, and supports us under them, it may justly be said to give *rest to them who labour and are heavy laden.* When much that is material and important is effected, we have no cause to complain, though all that we desire be not accomplished.—In this part of the discourse, I am to be considered as addressing myself not merely to such as are at present suffering any severe calamity; I now speak to many, who in the midst of health and affluence, enjoy the various comforts of life. But I must desire such persons to look forward to what may one day

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day be their state. Let them reflect how important it is to prepare themselves for the future unknown vicissitudes of the world. For, *if a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many* *.— Now, either in the prospect of future distress, or under present suffering, I say, that the religion of Christ gives *rest* to the heart, by the fortitude which it inspires, and by the consolations which it affords. SERMON V.

*First*, It inspires fortitude. It discovers a supreme administration, so friendly to the interests of goodness, as never to allow the followers of Christ to dread, that, in any situation of fortune, they shall be neglected by Heaven. From the abstract consideration of the divine perfections, men had always some ground to believe, that the general order of the universe was consulted by its great Ruler. But how far the interest of individuals might be obliged to yield, or, in many cases, might be sacrificed, to this general order, they were left altogether in the dark. Here the

* Eccles. xi. 8.

gospel

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gospel of Christ comes to our aid, by the explicit assurance which it gives, that, in the great system of Providence, the welfare of every single good man is particularly included. *All things*, we are expressly told, are made to *work together*, not merely for the order and perfection of the whole, but also, *for good to them who love God* *. The life of every person who comes under this description, forms a system complete within itself; where every event that happens to him possesses its destined place, and forms a link in that great chain of causes, which was appointed, from the beginning of things, for carrying on his improvement and felicity. Such an arrangement of the affairs of the world, may appear astonishing to our narrow capacities; yet surely implies no effort beyond the reach of infinite power, joined with infinite wisdom and goodness.

Hence arises a degree of fortitude and constancy to good men, which can upon no other grounds be attained. Faith, in these principles of the Gospel, erects for

* Rom. viii. 28.

them

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them a fortress impregnable to the assaults of the world into which they can at all times retreat. Sitting under the shelter of Divine protection, they calmly hear the storm, when it blows with its utmost violence around them. *The floods have lifted up their voice; they have lifted up all their waves. But the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yea, than the mighty waves of the Sea* *. Of the man who possesses such principles, it is justly said, *His heart is established; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord* †. Tranquillity, order, and magnanimity, dwell with him; while all is confusion and trepidation among those, who have nothing to look to but the apparent disorders of the world.

THE doctrine of Christ not only arms us, in this manner, with fortitude against the approach of evil; but, supposing evils to fall upon us with their heaviest pressure, it lightens the load by many consolations to which others are strangers. While bad men

* Psalm xciii. 3, 4. † Psalm cxii. 7, 8.



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trace, in the calamities with which they are visited, the hand of an offended Sovereign, Christians are taught to view them as the well-intended chastisements of a merciful father. They hear, amidst them, that still voice which a good conscience brings to their ear; *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God* *. They apply to themselves the comfortable promises with which the gospel abounds. They discover in these the happy issue decreed to their troubles; and wait with patience till Providence shall have accomplished its great and good designs. In the mean time, devotion opens to them its blessed and holy sanctuary: that sanctuary in which the wounded heart is healed, and the weary mind is at rest; where the cares of the world are forgotten, where its tumults are hushed, and its miseries disappear; where greater objects open to our view than what the world presents; where a more serene sky shines, and a sweeter and calmer light beams on the afflicted heart. In those moments of devotion, a pious man, pour-

* Isaiah, xli. 10.



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ing out his wants and sorrows to an almighty Supporter, feels that he is not left solitary and forsaken in a vale of woe. God is with him, Christ and the Holy Ghost are with him; and though he should be bereaved of every earthly friend, he can look up in heaven to a friend who will never die. SERMON V.

To these present consolations, the religion of Christ adds the joyful prospect of that future state, where eternal *rest remaineth for the people of God.* This life they are taught to consider as only the *house of their pilgrimage*; the temporary mansion of painful though necessary discipline. But let them endure for a little, and the pilgrimage shall end, the discipline shall be finished; and all the virtuous be assembled in those blissful regions which are prepared for their reward. Such a prospect cheers the darkest hours of life; and affords a remedy to every trouble. *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed**. They appear, in this comparative view, as no more

* Rom. viii. 18.



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than a distressing dream of the night, from which one awakes into health, and light, and joy. Peculiar is this high consolation to the religion of Christ. It is what all nations had eagerly wished for; what all philosophy had anxiously sought to discover; but what no research, no philosophy were able to ascertain to mankind, till Christ brought the assurance of life and immortality from heaven; and conferred on his disciples this noble and inestimable gift.

THUS, on the whole, the Christian doctrine is found to be the great medicine of life. It is the balm of human sorrows and cares. In our present state, where so many are suffering actual distress, of one kind or other, and where all have reason to dread the approach of distress, it is religion only that can alleviate the burdens of life, and smooth our passage through this evil world.——Let this view of religion persuade us to improve the sacred ordinance of our Lord's supper for *coming unto Christ* in the way before explained: that is, joining ourselves to him as his disciples; his disciples,

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disciples, not in words and professions only, but in heart and in truth; *taking upon us his yoke*, as is added in the words immediately following the text: and *learning of him who is meek and lowly in heart.* Let those who labour under the sense of remembered follies and crimes, *come unto Christ* with penitent dispositions, and they shall obtain pardon. Let those who labour under the suffering of present, or the apprehension of future sorrows, *come unto Christ*, and they shall receive consolation. All who are in any sense *heavy laden*, coming unto him, shall find *rest* to their souls. SERMON V.

BEFORE concluding this discourse, there is another set of men not yet mentioned, to whom I must also address the exhortation in the text; those I mean who, labouring under none of the distressful burdens of life, are surfeited of its pleasures; who labour under the burden only of languid ease, and the load of insipid prosperity. You drag, my friends, but a miserable existence. Oppressed by no sorrow, you feel vacuity and dissatisfaction within; you



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are often weary of Life; and in your solitary hours, are disposed to confess that all you have experienced is vanity. Wherefore should you any longer *spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Come to the waters which are now offered to you, and drink. Hear, and your souls shall live.* Retreat from the corrupting vanities of the world to Christ, to religion, and to virtue. New sources of enjoyment shall then be opened to you. A world yet untried shall display itself to your view. You shall be formed to a relish for the quiet and innocent pleasures of piety and devotion; of friendship and good affections; of useful knowledge, and virtuous activity; of calm society, and seasonable retirement; pleasures of which at present you have no conception; but which, upon trial, you shall find superiour to the trifling or turbulent amusements, in which you have hitherto passed your days.—The true satisfaction of the human mind is only to be found in religion and goodness; in a purified heart and a virtuous life. All other plans of happiness are fallacious, and pregnant with disappointment.

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ment. It is only by *acquainting ourselves with God* that we can *find peace:* And those who are *weary and heavy laden* now, shall be *weary and heavy laden* to the end, unless they come to him who only can *give them rest.*

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# SERMON VI.

## On Luxury and Licentiousness.

Isaiah, v. 12.

*The harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.*

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IT appears from many passages in the writings of this prophet, that in his days great corruption of manners had begun to take place among the people of Israel. Originally a sober and a religious nation, accustomed to a simple and pastoral life, after they had enlarged their territories by conquest, and acquired wealth by commerce, they gradually contracted

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tracted habits of luxury; and luxury soon introduced its usual train of attending evils. In the history of all nations the same circulation of manners has been found; and the age in which we live resembles, in this respect, the ages which have gone before it. Forms of iniquity may vary; but the corrupt propensities of men remain at all times much the same; and revolutions from primitive simplicity to the refinements of criminal luxury have been often exhibited on the stage of the world. The reproof directed in the text to the Jews of that antient age will be found equally applicable to the manners of many in modern times. In discoursing from it, I shall first consider the character of those who are described in the text, and shew the guilt that is involved in it. I shall next consider the duties which persons of that character are supposed to have neglected; to *regard the work of the Lord, and to consider the operation of his hands.*

I. WHEN we take into view the character pointed at in the text, it is evident that

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that what the prophet means to reprove is the spirit of inconsiderate dissipation, of intemperate indulgence, and irreligious luxury. It is not *the feast and the wine, the harp and the viol*, which he means to condemn. Music and wine are, in themselves, things of innocent nature: Nay, when temperately enjoyed, they may be employed for useful purposes; for affording relaxation from the oppressive cares of life, and for promoting friendly intercourse among men. The opulent are not prohibited from enjoying the good things of this world, which Providence has bestowed upon them. Religion neither abolishes the distinction of ranks, (as the vain philosophy of some would teach us to do,) nor interferes with a modest and decent indulgence of pleasure. It is the criminal abuse of pleasure which is here censured; that thoughtless and intemperate enjoyment of it which wholly absorbs the time and attention of men; which obliterates every serious thought of the proper business of life; and effaces the sense of religion and of God.

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It may be proper to remark, that it is not open and direct impiety, which is laid to the charge of the persons here characterised. It is not said, that in their feast they scoffed at religion, or blasphemed the name of God. To this summit of wickedness these persons had not yet arrived; perhaps the age in which they lived gave not its countenance to this wantonness of impiety. It is merely a negative crime of which they are accused, that they *regarded not the work of the Lord, neither considered the operation of his hands.* But this absence of all religious impressions is here pointed out, as sufficient to stigmatise their characters with guilt. As soon as the sense of a Supreme Being is lost, the great check is taken off, which keeps under restraint the passions of men. Mean desires and low pleasures take place of the greater and nobler sentiments which reason and religion inspire. Amidst the tumult of *the wine and the feast*, all proper views of human life are forgotten. The duties which, as men, they have to perform, the part they have to act in the world, and the distresses

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distresses to which they are exposing themselves, are banished from their thoughts. *To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly*, is the only voice. Inflamed by society, and circulated from one loose companion to another, the spirit of riot grows and swells, till it ends in brutal excess.

Were such disorders rare and occasional merely, they might perhaps be forgotten and forgiven. But nourished by repetition and habit, they grow up among too many, to become the business and occupation of life. By these unfortunate votaries of pleasure, they are accounted essential to happiness. Life appears to stagnate without them. Having no resource within themselves, their spirits sink, and their very being seems annihilated, till the return of their favourite pleasures awaken within them some transient sparkles of joy. Idleness, ease, and prosperity, have too natural a tendency to generate the follies and vices now described. *Because they have no changes*, said the Psalmist, *therefore they fear not God* *. They are the dark and solitary

* Psalm lv. 19.

hours

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hours of life, which recall men to recollection and wisdom. They show to the unthinking what this world really is, and what may be expected from it. But the day that is always bright and unclouded, is not made for men. It flatters them with the dangerous illusion, that it is in their power to render life one scene of pleasure; and that they have no other business on earth, but to spread the *feast*, and call *the harp and the viol* to sound. But the examples are so frequent, of the dangers and the crimes which arise from an intemperate abuse of pleasure, that on this part of the subject it seems needless to insist any longer. I proceed, therefore,

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II. To consider the duties which men are accused of having neglected; and which it is here supposed, if duly attended to, would have acted as the correctives of dissolute and irreligious luxury; these are, *to regard the work of the Lord*, and to *consider the operation of his hands*.—By recommending such duties, I do not mean to represent it as requisite



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that the feast should be turned into an act of worship; that the countenances of men should be always grave; or that, in the hours of amusement and of social festivity, no subject may employ their thoughts and their discourse, except God and a future state. All extremes in religion are dangerous; and by carrying austerity too far, we are in hazard of only promoting hypocrisy. But though some in the last age, might be prone to this extreme; yet, at the present day, there is not much occasion for warning men against it.—What I now insist upon is, that all our pleasures ought to be tempered with a serious sense of God; that scenes of gaiety and enjoyment should never make us forget that we are subjects of his government, and have a part allotted us to act in this world; that on no occasion they should be prolonged so much, repeated so often, or suffered to transport us so far, as to lead us to break any of the Divine laws, or to act inconsistently with the character of men and Christians. A prevailing sense of God on the mind is to be ever held the surest

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surest guard of innocence and virtue, amidst the allurements of pleasure. It is the salutary mixture which must be infused into the cup of joy, in order to render it safe and innoxious. SERMON VI.

This sense of God should lead us in the language of the prophet, *to regard the work of the Lord, and to consider the operation of his hands*; which expressions may be understood as requiring us to have God upon our thoughts under two views; *to regard his work*, as the Author of nature; and *to consider the operation of his hands*, as the Governor of the world. Let us attend more particularly to each of these views of the Supreme Being.

In the first place, we are to view God as the Author of nature, *or to regard the work of the Lord.* With his works we are in every place surrounded. We can cast our eyes no where, without discerning the hand of Him who formed them, if the grossness of our minds will only allow us to behold Him. Let giddy and thoughtless men turn aside a little from the haunts of riot. Let them stand still, and

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and contemplate the wondrous works of God; and make trial of the effect which such contemplation would produce.—It were good for them that even independently of the Author, they were more acquainted with his works; good for them, that from the societies of loose and dissolute men, they would retreat to the scenes of nature; would oftener dwell among them, and enjoy their beauties. This would form them to the relish of uncorrupted innocent pleasures; and make them feel the value of calm enjoyments, as superiour to the noise and turbulence of licentious gaiety. From the harmony of nature and of nature's works, they would learn to hear sweeter sounds than what arise from *the viol, the tabret and the pipe.*

But to higher and more serious thoughts these works of nature give occasion, when considered in conjunction with the Creator who made them.—Let me call on you, my friends, to catch some interval of reflection, some serious moment, for looking with thoughtful eye on the world around you. Lift your view to that immense

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immense arch of heaven which encompasses you above. Behold the sun in all his splendour rolling over your head by day; and the moon by night, in mild and serene majesty, surrounded with that host of stars which present to your imagination an innumerable multitude of worlds. Listen to the awful voice of thunder. Listen to the roar of the tempest and the ocean. Survey the wonders that fill the earth which you inhabit. Contemplate a steady and powerful Hand, bringing round spring and summer, autumn and winter, in regular course; decorating this earth with innumerable beauties, diversifying it with innumerable inhabitants, pouring forth comforts on all that live; and, at the same time, overawing the nations with the violence of the elements, when it pleases the Creator to let them forth.—After you have viewed yourselves as surrounded with such a scene of wonders; after you have beheld, on every hand, such an astonishing display of majesty united with wisdom and goodness; are you not seized with solemn and serious awe? Is there not some-



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thing which wispers you within, that to this great Creator reverence and homage are due by all the rational beings whom he has made? Admitted to be spectators of his works, placed in the midst of so many great and interesting objects, can you believe that you were brought hither for no purpose, but to immerse yourselves in gross and brutal, or, at best, in trifling pleasures; lost to all sense of the wonders you behold; lost to all reverence of that God who gave you being, and who has erected this amazing fabric of nature, on which you look only with stupid and unmeaning eyes?—No: Let the scenes which you behold prompt correspondent feelings. Let them awaken you from the degrading intoxication of licentiousness, into nobler emotions. Every object which you view in nature, whether great or small, serves to instruct you. The star and the insect, the fiery meteor and the flower of spring, the verdant field and the lofty mountain, all exhibit a Supreme Power, before which you ought to tremble and adore; all preach the doctrine, all inspire the spirit of devotion and reverence.

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fence. *Regarding*, then, *the work of the Lord*, let rising emotions of awe and gratitude call forth from your souls such sentiments as these:—"Lord, wherever I "am, and whatever I enjoy, may I never "forget thee, as the Author of nature! "May I never forget that I am thy crea- "ture and thy subject! In this magnificent "temple of the universe, where thou hast "placed me, may I ever be thy faithful "worshipper, and may the reverence and "the fear of God be the first sentiments "of my heart!"—It is to such consideration of God I would now recal your thoughts from the *wine and the feast*, as proper to check the spirit of levity and folly; and to inspire manly and becoming sentiments, in the place of criminal dissipation. But, SERMON VI.

In the *second* place, there is a consideration of a nature still more serious to be employed for the same purpose; the consideration of God as not only the Author of nature, but the Governor of his creatures. While we *regard the work of the Lord*, we are also to *consider the* never-ceas-



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ing *operation of his hands.* We are to look up to an awful and irresistable Providence, stretching its arm over our heads; directing the fate of men, and dispensing at its pleasure happiness or misery. In the giddy moments of jollity, the wanton and thoughtless are apt to say: "*Let us eat and* "*drink, for to-morrow we die.* Nothing "is better for man, than to rejoice as "much as he can all the days of his vain "life; and to keep himself undisturbed "by superstitious terrours. He who sit- "teth in the heavens bestows no minute "attention on the sons of earth. He per- "mits *all things to come alike to all; one* "*event to happen to the righteous and to the* "*wicked.*"—Be assured, my brethren, it is not so. You greatly deceive yourselves, by imagining that your Creator and Governour is indifferent to the part you are now acting; or that the distribution of good and evil, which now takes place, has no relation to your moral conduct. In some instances, that relation may not be apparent; because the moral government of God is not completed in this world. But a multitude of proofs shew government to

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to be already begun; and point out to you the train in which you may expect it to proceed. SERMON VI.

In the history of all ages and nations, you cannot but have observed a thousand instances in which *the operation of the divine hand* has been displayed; overtaking evil-doers sooner or later with punishment, and bringing on their own heads the ruin they had devised for others. You are not to imagine that this displeasure of Providence is exerted only against the ambitious, the treacherous, and the cruel, who are the authors of extensive misery to the world. Under this idea, perhaps you may be desirous to shelter yourselves, that your excesses are of a harmless kind; that you seek nothing more than the enjoyment of your own pleasures; that your *feast* and your *wine* interfere not with the order of the world; and that therefore you have done nothing which should awake the sleeping thunder, and bring it down from heaven on your heads. Though not stained with the blackest colours of guilt, your conduct may nevertheless be highly offensive to the Ruler of the world. His go-



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vernment is not of that indolent inattentive kind, which allows impunity to every lesser criminal. He beholds with displeasure the behaviour of those who degrade their nature by vicious disorders; and contaminate, by their example, every society with which they are connected. His measures are taken, that, in one way or other, they shall suffer.

Look around the circle of your acquaintance, and observe, whether they are not the sober, the industrious, and the virtuous, who visibly prosper in the world, and rise into reputation and influence; observe whether the licentious and intemperate are not constantly humbled and checked by some dark reverse either in their health or their fortune; whether the irreligious and profligate are ever suffered to escape long, without being marked with infamy, and becoming objects of contempt.—I ask, to what cause this is to be ascribed, but to that *operation of the hand of God*, which I am now calling you to consider? Does it not obviously carry the marks of a plan, a system of things contrived and fore-ordained by Providence, for

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for rewarding virtue, and punishing vice in every form of its disorders?—The Governor of the world need not for this purpose step from his throne, or put forth his hand from the clouds. With admirable wisdom he hath so ordered the train of human affairs, that, in their natural course, men's *own wickedness shall reprove them, and their backslidings correct them; that they shall be made to eat the fruit of their doings, and to fall into the pit which themselves had digged.* SERMON VI.

These things have been always so apparent to observation, that though a man may have been seduced into irregular and evil courses during his life, yet, at the close of it, it seldom happens but he discerns their pernicious nature, and condemns himself for them. Never, perhaps, was there a father, who, after he had spent his days in idleness, dissipation, and luxury, did not, when dying, admonish the children whom he loved, to hold a more honourable course, to follow the paths of virtue, to fear God, and to fulfil properly the duties of their station.—To yourselves, indeed, I can confidently ap-



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peal, whether what I am now saying, be not confirmed by your own testimony. After you have been guilty of some criminal acts, in the course of those riotous pleasures which you indulge, have you not, at certain times, felt the stings of remorse? Were you not obliged to confess to yourselves that a sad prospect of misery was opening before you, if such excesses were to continue? Did you not hear an inward voice upbraiding you, for having sunk and degraded your character so far below that of many of your equals around you?—My friends, what was this but the voice of God, speaking, as the Governour of his creatures, within your heart; testifying loudly, that your course of life was displeasing to him; and warning you of punishments that were to follow. If his displeasure against you is already begun to be testified, can you tell where it is to stop, or how long it may continue to pursue you, throughout future stages of your existence? *Who knoweth the power of his wrath?*—To this awful, this warning voice, will you not be persuaded reverently to listen? Impressed

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pressed by the dread authority which it carries, shall you not fall down on your knees before your Maker, imploring his mercy to pardon your past offences, and his grace to rectify your future way? SERMON VI.

SUCH ought to be the effects of the consideration of God as the Governour of the world. It leads to thoughts of a very serious nature. When we *regard the work of the Lord*, and contemplate him as the Author of the universe, such contemplation prompts devotion. But when we *consider the operation of his hands* in providence, and contemplate him as the Governour of mankind, such contemplation prompts humiliation before him for offences committed. The former addresses itself to the ingenuous sentiments that are left in the heart; and awakens a sense of our unworthiness, in neglecting the Author of nature amidst our riotous pleasures. The latter addresses itself to our regard for safety and happiness; and awakens fear and dread, from consciousness of the guilt we have contracted. Hence springs up in every thoughtful mind, an anxious concern to avert the displeasure, and regain



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the favour of that Supreme Being to whom we are all subject. This, among unenlightened nations, gave rise to sacrifices, expiations, and all the rites of humble though superstitious worship. Among nations, who have been instructed in true religion, sentiments of the same nature pave the way for prayer, repentance, faith, and all those duties, by means of which we may hope, through a divine Mediator and Intercessor, to be reconciled to heaven. Natural and revealed religion here appear in concord. We behold the original dictates of the human heart laying a foundation for the glad reception of the comfortable tidings of the gospel.

I HAVE thus endeavoured to shew in what manner, by *regarding the work of the Lord, and considering the operation of his hands*, we may prevent the dangers arising from a thoughtless indulgence of pleasure; we may be furnished with an antidote to the poison which is too often mixed in that intoxicating cup.—Human life is full of troubles. We are all tempted to alleviate them as much as we can, by freely enjoying the pleasurable moments which Providence

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dence thinks fit to allow us. Enjoy them we may: But, if we would enjoy them safely, and enjoy them long, let us temper them with the fear of God. As soon as this is forgotten and obliterated, the sound of *the harp and the viol* is changed into the signal of death. The serpent comes forth from the roses where it had lain in ambush, and gives the fatal sting. Pleasure in moderation is the cordial, in excess it is the bane, of life. SERMON VI.

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# SERMON VII.

## On the PRESENCE of GOD in a FUTURE STATE.

PSALM xvi. 11.

*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

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THE apostle Peter, in a discourse which he held to the Jews, applies this passage, in a mystical and prophetical sense, to the Messiah *. But, in its literal and primitive meaning, it expresses the exalted hopes by which the Psalmist David supported himself amidst the changes and revolutions, of which his life was full. By

* Acts, ii. 25—28.

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these hopes when flying before Saul, when driven from his throne, and persecuted by an unnatural son, he was enabled to preserve his virtue, and to maintain unshaken trust in God.—In that early age of the world, those explicit discoveries of a state of immortality, which we enjoy, had not yet been given to mankind. But though the *Sun of righteousness* was not arisen, the dawn had appeared of that glorious day which he was to introduce. Even in those ancient times, holy men, as the Apostle writes to the Hebrews, *saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them; and, confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, declared that they sought after a better country, that is an heavenly* *. Indeed, in every age, God permitted such hopes to afford support and consolation to those who served him. The full effect of them we behold in those triumphant expressions of the text, which are to be the subject of this discourse. They lead us to consider; first, The hope of the Psalmist in his present state; *Thou wilt shew*

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* Heb. xi. 13—16.

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*me the path of life.* And, secondly, the termination of his hope in that future state, where *in the presence of God is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

I. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life.* This plainly imports, that there are different *paths*, or courses of conduct, which may be pursued by men in this world; a path which leads to life or happiness, and a path which issues in death or destruction. These opposite lines of conduct are determined by the choice which men make of virtue or of vice; and hence men are divided into two great classes, according as their inclinations lead them to good or to evil. *The path of life* is often a rough and difficult path, followed only by a few. The opposite one is the broad way, in which the multitude walk; seemingly smooth, and strewed with flowers; but leading in the end to death and misery. *The path of life* conducts us up a steep ascent. The palace of virtue has, in all ages, been represented as placed on the summit of a hill; in the ascent of which labour

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labour is requisite, and difficulties are to be surmounted; and where a conductor is needed, to direct our way, and to aid our steps.

Now, the hope which good men entertain is, that this *path of life* shall be shewn them by God; that, when their intentions are upright, God will both instruct them concerning the road which leads to true happiness, and will assist them to pursue it successfully. Among nations where any suitable ideas of God or of virtue began to be formed, hopes of this nature also began to be entertained. It was consonant to the nature of man, to think that the Supreme Being was favourable to virtue. Accordingly, in the writings of some of the ancient philosophers, we find various obscure traces of this belief, that there was a benign heavenly Spirit, who illuminated the minds of the virtuous, and assisted their endeavours to obtain wisdom and happiness. They even asserted, that no man became great or good, without some inspiration of Heaven.

But what they indistinctly conceived, and could not with confidence rely upon, the

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the doctrine of Christianity hath clearly explained and fully confirmed; expressly and frequently teaching, that, not only by the external discoveries of revelation, but by the inward operations of his Spirit, he *shews* to the humble and virtuous *the path of life*. While, by his word, he instructs them in their duty, by the influence of his grace he assists them in the performance of it. In all revelation there is certainly no doctrine more comfortable than this. It is to good men a noble and pleasing thought, that they are pursuing a path which God has discovered and pointed out to them. For they know that every path, in which he is their conductor, must be honourable, must be safe, must bring them in the end to felicity. They follow that *Shepherd of Israel*, who always leads his flock into *green pastures, and makes them lie down beside the still waters*. At the same time, they know that, if there be truth in religion at all, on this principle they may securely rest, that the Divine Being will never desert those who are endeavouring to follow out, as they can, the path which he

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he has shewn them. He beholds them here in a state of great imbecility; surrounded with much darkness; exposed to numberless dangers, from the temptations that assault them without, and the seduction of misguided and disorderly passions within. In this situation, can they ever suspect that the Father of mercies will leave his servants, alone and unbefriended, to struggle up the hill of virtue, without stretching forth a compassionate arm to aid their frailty, and to guide them through the bewildering paths of life? Where were then the *God of love?* Where, those infinite compassions of his nature, in which all his worshippers have been encouraged to trust? — No: He will *send forth his light and his truth to bring them to his holy hill.* For *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance beholdeth the upright.* With him there is no oblique purpose, to turn him aside from favouring the cause of goodness. No undertaking to which he has given his countenance shall prove abortive. No promise that he has made shall be allowed to fail. Whom he loveth, *he loveth to the end. The secret*



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*of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant. The meek will he guide in judgment, and them will he teach his way. His grace shall be sufficient for them, and his strength be made perfect in their weakness. They go from strength to strength; every one of them appeareth before God in Zion* *.—Such are the hopes with which good men in the present life set forth on a course of piety and virtue. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life.* Let us now proceed,

II. To consider the termination of these hopes in a future state. *In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.* All happiness assuredly dwells with God. The *fountain of life* is justly said to be *with him.* That supreme and independent Being must necessarily possess within himself every principle of beatitude; and no cause from without can possibly affect his untroubled felicity. Among created dependent beings, happiness flows in scattered and feeble streams; streams that are often tinged

* Pſal. xxv. 14. 9. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Pſal. lxxxiv. 7.



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with the blackness of misery. But from before the throne of God issues the river of life, full, unmixed, and pure; and the pleasures, which now in scanty portions we are permitted to taste, are all derived from that source. Whatever gladdens the hearts of men or angels, with any real and satisfactory joy, comes from heaven. It is a portion of the *pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty*; a ray *issuing from the brightness of the everlasting life*. It is manifest, therefore, that every approach to God must be an approach to felicity. The enjoyment of his immediate presence must be the consummation of felicity; and it is to this presence the Psalmist here expresses his hope, that the *path of life* was to conduct him. SERMON VII.

The whole of what is implied in arriving at the presence of the Divinity, we cannot expect to comprehend. Such expressions as these of Scripture, *beholding the face of God*; *being made glad with the light of his countenance, and satisfied with his likeness*; *seeing light in his light*; *seeing no longer darkly as through a glass, but face*



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*to face*; *seeing him as he is*; are expressions altogether mysterious, conveying sublime though obscure ideas of the most perfect happiness and highest exaltation of human nature. This we know, that the absence of God, the distance at which we are now placed from any communication with our Creator, is one great source of our infelicity. Faith exerts its endeavours, but often ineffectually, to raise our souls to him. He is a *God that hideth himself*. His ways seem intricate and perplexed. We frequently cannot reconcile them to the conceptions which we had formed of his nature; and with many a suspicion and doubt they perplex the enquiring mind. His works we survey with astonishment. We wonder and adore. But while we clearly trace the footsteps of their great Author, his presence we can never discern. *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him* *. Hence, amidst the various sorrows and discouragements of the present

* Job, xxiii. 8, 9,

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state, that exclamation of Job's is often drawn forth from the pious heart, *O that I knew were I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!* *. SERMON VII.

Surrounded by such distressing obscurity, no hope more transporting can be opened to a good man, than that a period is to come when he shall be allowed to draw nearer to the author of his existence, and to enjoy the sense of his presence. In order to convey some faint idea of that future bliss, by such an image as we can now employ, let the image be taken from the most glorious representative of the Supreme Being, with which we are acquainted in this world, the Sun in the heavens. As that resplendent luminary cheers and revives the universe, when after the darkness of the tempestuous night, it comes forth in the morning with its brightest lustre, and inspires every heart with gladness; as ascending gradually through the heavens, it converts that whole vast extent, over which its beams are diffused, into a region of light; and thus changes

* Job, xxiii. 3.



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entirely the state of objects by arraying all nature in beauty, and transforming it into the image of its own brightness:— Some such change as this, though in a degree infinitely superiour, we may conceive the revelation of the Divine Presence to produce upon the human soul. *I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.*— But, without endeavouring further to unfold mysteries which we cannot explore, there are two sublime and expressive views of the Divine Essence given us in scripture, on which it may be edifying that our thoughts should rest for a little, in order to aid our conceptions of the blessedness of good men hereafter, in the presence of God. It is said, *God is light* *; *God is love* †. Let us consider what *fulness of joy* must arise from such manifestations of the Divine Essence to the blessed.

*God is Light.* The revelation of his presence infers, of course, a complete diffu-

* 1 John, i. 5. † 1 John, iv. 8.

sion

sion of light and knowledge among all who partake of that presence. This unquestionably forms a primary ingredient of happiness. Ignorance, or the want of light, is the source of all our present misconduct, and all our misfortunes. The heart of man is dark; and in the darkness of his heart is the seat of his corruption. He is unable to discern what is truly good. Perpetually employed in search of happiness, he is perpetually misled by false appearances of it. The errours of his understanding impose upon his passions; and, in consequence of the wrong directions which his passions take, he is betrayed into a thousand disorders. Hence sensuality, covetousness, and all the violent contests with others about trifles, which occasion so much misery, and so many crimes in the world. *He feedeth on ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand**?— Once open to him the perfect sources of knowledge and truth; suppose him placed

* Isaiah, xliv. 20.



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in the presence of that God who is *Light*; suppose him illuminated by light derived immediately from the Supreme Being; presently all his former errours would fly away, as mists are dispelled by the rising sun. His whole nature would be changed and reformed. The prejudices which obscured his understanding would be removed. The seductions of his passions would disappear. Rectitude and virtue, having nothing now to obstruct their entrance, would take entire possession of his heart. Angels are happier than men, because they enjoy more enlarged knowledge and views; because they labour under none of our unhappy deceptions; but see the truth as it is in itself; see it, as it is in God. Sharing the same light which illuminates them, good men in a future state will share in their felicity.

Moreover, the light that flows from the presence of Him who is the original source of light, not only banishes miseries which were the effects of former darkness but also confers the most exquisite enjoyment,

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ment. The knowledge afforded us at present serves to supply our most pressing wants; but it does no more. It is always imperfect and unsatisfactory; nay, much painful anxiety it often leaves. Narrow is the sphere within which the mind can see at all; and even there it can see only *darkly as through a glass.* But when it shall be enlarged beyond this dusky territory, let loose from this earthly prison, and in *God's light* permitted to see *light*, the most magnificent and glorious spectacles must open to the view of the purified spirit. What must it be to behold the whole stupendous scene of nature unveiled, and its hidden mysteries disclosed! To trace the wise and just government of the Almighty, through all those intricacies which had so long perplexed us! To behold his hand conducting ten thousand worlds, which are now unknown to us; and throughout all the regions of boundless space, to view wisdom and goodness perpetually acting, and diversifying its operations in forms of endless variety! Well may such discoveries inspire that song of the blessed, which



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the apostle John heard *as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints*!* As *God is Light*, so also it is said in scripture,

*God is Love.* His presence must of course diffuse love, among all who are permitted to dwell in it. *He that loveth not, knoweth not God. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him* †. Were man a single, solitary being, the full enjoyment of light might suffice for his happiness; as the perfection of knowledge would rectify and improve to the highest all his faculties. But, both here and hereafter, he is connected with other beings. Heaven implies a society; and the felicity of that society is constituted by the perfection of love and goodness, flowing from the presence of the God of love.

* Rev. xix. 6.; xv. 3. † 1 John, iv. 8. 16.

Hence

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Hence follows the entire purification of human nature from all those malevolent passions, which have so long rendered our abode on earth the abode of misery. We greatly deceive ourselves, when we charge our chief distresses merely to the account of our external condition in the world. From the disadvantages attending it, I admit, that we may often have been exposed to suffer. We have met with disappointments in our pursuits. By the arrows of misfortune, we may have been wounded. Under infirmities of body, we may have languished. But on this we may depend, that the worst evils of our present condition arise from the want of goodness and love; from the disorders of selfish passions; from the irritation which these occasion when working within ourselves, and the distress which they produce when breaking out upon us from others; in a word from that corrupted state of temper, and that reciprocation of jealousies, suspicions, and injuries, which is ever taking place among the societies of men. Could you banish distrust, craft, and uncharitableness, from the

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the earth, and form all mankind into an assembly of the just and the benevolent; could you inspire every heart with kind affections, and render every one friendly and generous to his neighbour; you would banish at once the most afflictive tribe of human evils. Seldom would the voice of complaint be heard. All nature would assume a different aspect. Cheerfulness would be seen in every countenance. Paradise would return. The wilderness would smile; *the desart rejoice and blossom as the rose.*—Now such are the effects which the presence of the God of love must produce on the inhabitants above, *beholding his glory, they are changed into the same image.* In that temple of eternal love, which his presence has hallowed and consecrated, no sound but the voice of harmony is ever heard; no appearances ever present themselves but those of peace and joy.

THUS, considering God under these two illustrious characters which are given of him in scripture, as *Light*, and as *Love*, it follows that in his presence there must be

*fulness*

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*fulness of joy.* But I am far from saying that the few imperfect hints I have now given exhaust, or even approach to the sum of those *pleasures for evermore which are at God's right hand.* Ten thousand pleasures are there, which now we have neither faculties to comprehend, nor powers to enjoy. Behind that mysterious cloud, which covers the habitation of eternity, the view of mortals cannot penetrate. Content with our humble and distant situation, we must as yet remain. Faith can only look to those glories from afar. In patient silence, it must wait, trust, and adore.

Supposing the ideas which I have set before you, in this discourse, to be no more than the speculations of a contemplative mind, such as were wont of old to be indulged by the philosophers of the Platonic school, still they would deserve attention, on account of their tendency to purify and elevate the mind. But when they are considered in connection with a revelation, which, upon grounds the most unquestionable, we believe to be divine, they are entitled to command, not attention

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tion only, but reverence and faith.—They present to us such high expectations as are sufficient to determine every reasonable man to the choice of virtue; to support him under all its present discouragements, and to comfort him in the hour of death. Justly may they excite in our hearts, that ardent aspiration of the Psalmist: *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; Oh! when shall I come, and appear before him!*—But, with this wish in our hearts, never, I beseech you, let us forget what was set forth in the first part of this discourse; that in order to arrive at the presence of God, the *path of life* must previously be shewn to us by him, and that in this path we must persevere to the end. These two things cannot be disjoined, a virtuous life and a happy eternity. *Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He only who hath clean hands and a pure heart.* Between a corrupted heart and the God of light and love, there never can be any connection. But of this we may rest assured, that the path of piety and virtue, pursued with a firm and constant

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constant spirit, will, in the end, through the merits of our blessed Redeemer, bring us to that presence, where *is fulness of joy, and where are pleasures for evermore.* SERMON VII.

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# SERMON VIII.

## On CURIOSITY concerning the AFFAIRS of others.

JOHN, xxi. 21, 22.

*Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*

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THESE words occurred in a conference which our Lord held with Simon Peter, after his resurrection from the dead. Conscious of the disgrace which he had incurred by his late denial of his Master, Peter must at this time have appeared before him with shame. Our Lord, after a tacit rebuke, implied in the question which he repeatedly puts to him, *Simon*,



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*son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* restores him, with great benignity, to his office as an apostle, by giving the commandment to *feed his sheep*; and intimates also, that it should be his lot to suffer death in the cause of his Master. The apostle John, distinguished here by the denomination of *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, being present at this conversation, Peter, who was always eager and forward, looking to John, puts this question to our Saviour, *Lord, and what shall this man do?* "What shall "be his employment? what his rank and "station in thy kingdom? what his future "fate in life?"—By what principle, Peter was moved to put this unseasonable and improper question to his Master; whether it arose from mere curiosity, or from some emotion of rivalship and jealousy, does not appear; but it is plain that our Lord was dissatisfied with the inquiry which he made; and presently he checks Peter's curiosity, by a severe reply; *What is that to thee?* "What is it to thee what *this* "*man shall do*; what shall be his rank; or "what the circumstance of his life or his "death? Attend thou to thine own duty.



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"Mind thy proper concerns. Fulfil the "part which I have allotted to thee. *Fol-* "*low thou me.*"—The instruction which arises from this conversation of our Lord's with Peter, is, That all prying inquiries into the state, circumstances, or character of others, are reprehensible and improper; that to every man a particular charge is assigned by his Lord and Master, the fulfilment of which ought to be the primary object of his attention, without officiously thrusting himself into the concerns of others. The illustration of these points shall make the subject of the present discourse.

THAT idle curiosity, that inquisitive and meddling spirit, which leads men to pry into the affairs of their neighbours, is reprehensible on three accounts. It interrupts the good order, and breaks the peace of society. It brings forward and nourishes several bad passions. It draws men aside from a proper attention to the discharge of their own duty.

IT interrupts, I say, the order, and breaks the peace of society. In this world we

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we are linked together by many ties. We are bound by duty, and we are prompted by interest, to give, mutual assistance, and to perform friendly offices to each other. But those friendly offices are performed to most advantage, when we avoid to interfere unnecessarily in the concerns of our neighbour. Every man has his own part to act, has his own interest to consult, has affairs of his own to manage, which his neighbour has no call to scrutinise. Human life then proceeds in its most natural and orderly train, when every one keeps within the bounds of his proper province; when, as long as his pursuits are fair and lawful, he is allowed, without disturbance, to conduct them in his own way. *That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business* *, is the apostolical rule, and indeed the great rule, for preservation of harmony and order. But so it is, that, in every age, a set of men have existed, who, driven by an unhappy activity of spirit, oftener perhaps than by any settled design of doing ill, or any mo-

* 1 Thess. iv. 11.



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tives of ambition or interest, love to intermeddle where they have no concern, to inquire into the private affairs of others, and, from the imperfect information which they collect, to form conclusions concerning their circumstances and character. These are they who, in scripture, are characterised as *tatlers, and busy bodies in other men's matters*, and from whom we are called to *turn away*.

Though persons of this description should be prompted by nothing but vain curiosity, they are, nevertheless, dangerous troublers of the world. While they conceive themselves to be inoffensive, they are sowing dissension and feuds. Crossing the lines in which others move, they create confusion, and awaken resentment. For every man conceives himself to be injured, when he finds another intruding into his affairs, and, without any title, taking upon him to examine his conduct. Being improperly and unnecessarily disturbed, he claims the right of disturbing in his turn those who wantonly have troubled him. Hence, many a friendship has been broken; the peace of many a family has been

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been overthrown; and much bitter and lasting discord has been propagated through society. SERMON VIII.

WHILE this spirit of meddling curiosity injures so considerably the peace and good order of the world, it also nourishes among individuals who are addicted to it, a multitude of bad passions. Its most frequent source is mere idleness, which, in itself a vice, never fails to engender many vices more. The mind of man cannot be long without some food to nourish the activity of its thoughts. The idle, who have no nourishment of this sort within themselves, feed their thoughts with inquiries into the conduct of their neighbours. The inquisitive and curious are always talkative. What they learn, or fancy themselves to have learned, concerning others, they are generally in haste to divulge. A tale which the malicious have invented, and the credulous have propagated; a rumour which, arising among the multitude, and transmitted by one to another, has, in every step of its progress, gained fresh additions, becomes in the end



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the foundation of confident assertion, and of rash and severe judgment.

It is often by a spirit of jealousy and rivalry, that the researches of such persons are prompted. They wish to discover something that will bring down their neighbour's character, circumstances, or reputation, to the level of their own; or that will flatter them with an opinion of their own superiority. A secret malignity lies at the bottom of their inquiries. It may be concealed by an affected show of candour and impartiality. It may even be veiled with the appearance of a friendly concern for the interest of others, and with affected apologies for their failings. But the hidden rancour is easily discovered.—While, therefore, persons of this description trouble the peace of society, they at the same time poison their own minds with malignant passions. Their disposition is entirely the reverse of that amiable spirit of charity, on which our religion lays so great a stress. Charity *covereth the multitude of sins*; but this prying and meddling spirit seeks to discover and divulge them. Charity *thinketh no evil*; but this

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this temper inclines us always to suspect the worst. Charity *rejoiceth not in iniquity*; this temper triumphs in the discovery of errours and failings. Charity, like the sun, brightens every object on which it shines; a censorious disposition casts every character into the darkest shade it will bear. SERMON VIII.

It is to be farther observed, that all impertinent curiosity about the affairs of others tends greatly to obstruct personal reformation; as it draws men's thoughts aside from what ought to be the chief object of attention, the improvement of their own heart and life. They who are so officiously occupied about their neighbours, have little leisure, and less inclination, to observe their own defects, or to mind their own duty. From their inquisitive researches, they find, or imagine they find, in the behaviour of others, an apology for their own failings: And the favourite result of their inquiries generally is to rest satisfied with themselves. They are at least as good, they think, as others around them. The condemnation which they



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pass on the vices of their neighbours, they interpret to be a sentiment of virtue in themselves. They become those hypocrites described by our Lord, who see clearly *the mote that is in their neighbour's eye, while they discern not the beam that is in their own.*

In opposition to such a character as this, the doctrine plainly inculcated by the text is, that to every man a particular charge is given by his Lord and Master, a part is assigned him by Providence to act; that to this he ought to bend his chief attention; and, instead of scrutinising the character or state of others, ought to think of himself, and leave them to stand or fall by their own master. *What shall this man do?* said Peter. *What*, replies our Lord, *is that to thee? Follow thou me.*

Where persons possess any important station, or distinguished rank in the world, the application of this doctrine to them is manifest. If they have any candour, they cannot refuse to acknowledge that God and the world have a title to expect from them

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them a diligent attention to their proper part in life; and that to waste their time in idle inquiries about others, with whom they have nothing to do, is reprehensible and sinful. But there are multitudes of mankind, to whom this appears in a very different light. They are humble and private men, who are willing to conceive themselves as of little importance in the world. Having no extensive influence, and no call, as they think, to distinguish themselves by active exertions in any sphere; they imagine that they may innocently lead an idle life, and indulge their curiosity, by canvassing at pleasure the character and the behaviour of those around them. With persons of this description every society too much abounds. —My brethren, no one ought to consider himself as insignificant in the sight of God. In our several stations we are all sent forth to be labourers in God's vineyard. Every man has his work allotted, his talent committed to him; by the due improvement of which he might, in one way or other, serve God, promote virtue, and be useful in the world. *Occupy till I come*, is the charge

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charge given to all Christians without exception. To be entirely unemployed and idle, is the prerogative of no one, in any rank of life.

Even that sex, whose task is not to mingle in the labours of public and active business, have their own part assigned them to act. In the quiet of domestic shade, there are a variety of virtues to be exercised, and of important duties to be discharged. Much depends on them for the maintenance of private œconomy and order, for the education of the young, and for the relief and comfort of those whose functions engage them in the toils of the world. Even where no such female duties occur to be performed, the care of preparing for future usefulness; and of attaining such accomplishments as procure just esteem, is laudable. In such duties and cares, how far better is time employed, than in that search into private concerns, that circulation of rumours, those discussions of the conduct, and descants on the character of others, which engross conversation so much, and which end, for the most part, in severity of censure?

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In whatever condition we are placed, to act always in character, should be our constant rule. He who acts in character, is above contempt, though his station be low. He who acts out of character, is despicable, though his station be ever so high. *What is that to thee*, what this man or that man does? Think of what thou oughtest to do thyself; of what is suitable to thy character and place; of what the world has a title to expect from thee. Every excursion of vain curiosity about others, is a subtraction from that time and thought which was due to ourselves and due to God. *Having gifts*, says the apostle Paul, *differing according to the grace that is given us, whether ministry, let us wait on our ministring; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation. He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness* *.

In the great circle of human affairs, there is room for every one to be busy

* Rom. xii. 6—9.

and

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and well-employed in his own province, without encroaching upon that of others. It is the province of superiours to direct; of inferiours, to obey; of the learned, to be instructive; of the ignorant, to be docile; of the old, to be communicative; of the young, to be advisable and diligent. Art thou poor? Show thyself active and industrious, peaceable and contented. Art thou wealthy? Show thyself beneficent and charitable, condescending and humane. If thou livest much in the world, it is thy duty to make the light of a good example shine conspicuously before others. If thou livest private and retired, it is thy business to improve thine own mind, and to add, if thou canst do no more, one faithful subject to the Messiah's kingdom. There is indeed no man so sequestered from active life, but within his own narrow sphere he may find some opportunities of doing good; of cultivating friendship, promoting peace, and discharging many of these lesser offices of humanity and kindness, which are within the reach of every one, and which we all owe to one another. In all the various relations which

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which subsist among us in life, as husband and wife, master and servants, parents and children, relations and friends, rulers and subjects, innumerable duties stand ready to be performed; innumerable calls to virtuous activity present themselves on every hand, sufficient to fill up with advantage and honour the whole time of man.

THERE is, in particular, one great and comprehensive object of attention, which, in the text, is placed in direct opposition to that idle curiosity reprehended by our Lord; that is, to follow Christ. *Follow thou me.* What this man or that man does; how he employs his time; what use he makes of his talents; how he succeeds in the world; are matters, concerning which the information we receive can never be of great importance to us; often, is of no importance at all. But how our Saviour behaved while he was on earth, or how, in our situation, he would have behaved, are matters of the highest moment to every Christian.

The commandment given in the text,



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to *follow him*, includes both observance of his words, and imitation of his example. The words of Christ contain, as we all know, the standing rule of our life. His example exhibits the great model on which our conduct ought to be formed; and it is to this that the precept here delivered directly refers.—Examples have great influence on all. But by all human examples, we are in danger of being occasionally misled. We are ever obliged to be on our guard, lest the admiration of what is estimable, betray us into a resemblance of what is blemished and faulty. For the most perfect human characters, in the midst of their brightness and beauty, are always marked with some of those dark spots which stain the nature of man. But our Lord possessed all the virtues of the greatest and best men, without partaking any of their defects. In him, all was light without a shade, and beauty without a stain.—At the same time, his example is attended with this singular advantage, of being more accommodated than any other to general imitation. It was distinguished by no unnatural austerities;

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rities, no affected singularities; but exhibits the plain and simple tenor of all those virtues for which we have most frequent occasion in ordinary life. In order to render it of more universal benefit, our Lord fixed his residence in no particular place; he tied himself down to no particular calling, or way of living; but gives us the opportunity of viewing his behaviour, in that variety of lights which equally and indifferently regard all mankind. His life was divided between the retired and the active state. Devotion and business equally shared it. In the discharge of that high office with which he was vested, we behold the perfect model of a public character; and we behold the most beautiful example of private life, when we contemplate him among his disciples, as a father in the midst of his family.— By such means he has exhibited before us specimens of every kind of virtue; and to all ranks and classes of men has afforded a pattern after which they may copy. Hardly is there any emergency which can occur in life, but from some incident in our Saviour's conduct, from some feature displayed





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played in his character, we are enabled to say to ourselves, "Thus Christ would have "spoken, thus he would have acted, thus "he would have suffered, if he had been "circumstanced as we are now."

Instead, therefore, of thinking of thy neighbours around thee, and of inquiring how they behave, keep Christ in thine eye, and in thy whole conduct follow him. *Follow him* in his steady and conscientious discharge of duty, amidst opposition from evil men and a corrupted world. Follow him in his patient submission to his Father's will, and the calmness of his spirit under all trials. Follow him in his acts of disinterested benevolence, in his compassion to the unhappy, in his readiness to oblige, to assist, and to relieve. Imitate the mildness and gentleness of his manners. Imitate the affability and condescension which appeared in his behaviour. Imitate the uncorrupted simplicity and purity which distinguished his whole life.

THESE are much worthier and nobler objects of your attention, than any of those trifling varieties which you can explore and

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and discover in the character of those among whom you live. By lifting your view to so high a standard, you will be preserved from descending to those futile and corrupting employments of thought, which occupy the idle, the vain, and the malignant. It is incredible, how much time and attention are thrown away by men in examining the affairs of others, and discussing their conduct. Were their time and attention thrown away only, the evil would, in some degree, be less. But they are worse than thrown away; they are not merely fruitless, but productive of much mischief. Such a habit of thought is connected with a thousand vices. It is the constant source of rash and severe censure. It arises from envy and jealousy. It foments ill-nature and pride. It propagates misunderstanding and discord. All those evils would be prevented, if the reproof which our Lord administe s in the text came oftener home, with proper authority to the reflection of men: *What is that to thee?* Each of us have more material and important business of our own to fulfil. Our task is assigned; our part

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allotted. Did we suitably examine how that part was performed, we should be less disposed to busy ourselves about the concerns of others. We should discover many a disorder to be corrected at home; many a weed to be pulled out from our own grounds; much remaining to be done, in order to render ourselves useful in this world, and fit for a world to come.—Wherefore, instead of being critics on others, let us employ our criticism on ourselves. Leaving others to be judged by Him who searcheth the heart, let us implore his assistance for enabling us to act well our own part, and to follow Christ.

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# SERMON IX.

## On our present IGNORANCE of the WAYS of GOD.

JOHN, xiii. 7.

*Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*

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THESE words of our Lord were occasioned by a circumstance in his behaviour which appeared mysterious to his disciples. When about to celebrate his last passover, he meant to give them an instructive lesson of condescension and humility. The mode which he chose for delivering this instruction, was the emblematical action of washing their feet. When



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Simon Peter saw his Master addressing himself to the performance of so menial an office, he exclaims with the greatest surprise, *Lord, dost thou wash my feet?* Our Lord replies, in the words of the text, *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* "My behaviour in "this instance, may seem unaccountable "to you at present; but you shall after-"wards receive a satisfactory explanation "of the intent of that symbol which I "now employ."

The expressions of a Divine Person, on this occasion, can very naturally and properly be applied to various instances, where the conduct of Providence, in the administration of human affairs, remains dark and mysterious to us. *What I do, thou knowest not now.* We must for a while be kept in ignorance of the designs of Heaven. But this ignorance, though necessary at present, is not always to continue. A time shall come when a commentary should be afforded on all that is now obscure; when the veil of mystery shall be removed; and full satisfaction be given to every rational mind. *Thou*



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*shalt know hereafter.* This is the doctrine which I purpose to illustrate in the following discourse. SERMON IX.

I. OUR Saviour's words lead us to observe, that many things in the conduct of Providence are at present mysterious and unintelligible. The truth of this observation will not be called in question. It is indeed very readily admitted by all; and ever since the beginning of the world has been the foundation of many a complaint, and of much scepticism concerning the government of Heaven.—That human affairs are not left to roll on according to mere chance, and that Providence interposes in them to a certain degree, is made evident by various tokens to every candid mind. But the perplexity and trouble of the thoughtful inquirer arises from observing that Providence appears not to pursue any regular or consistent plan. An unaccountable mixture of light and darkness presents itself to us, when we attempt to trace the affairs of the world up to any wise and righteous administration. We see justice and order begun;



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but on many occasions they seem to be deserted. The ray of light which we had traced for a while, suddenly forsakes us; and, where we had looked for the continuance of order, we meet with confusion and disappointment.—For instance; when we examine the constitution of the human mind, we discern evident marks of its being framed with a view to favour and reward virtue. Conscience is endowed with signal authority to check vice. It brings home uneasiness and remorse to the bad; and it soo ns and supports the righteous with self-approbation and peace. The ordinary course of human things is made to coincide in some degree with this constitution of our nature. The worthy and the good are, in general, honoured and esteemed. *He that walketh uprightly* is, for the most part, found to *walk surely*. The chief misfortunes that befal us in life can be traced to some vices or follies which we have committed; and it almost never happens but the *sinner's own wickedness is made*, sooner or later, *to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him*.

All this carries the impress of a just Providence

Providence, of a wise and a benevolent administration of the universe. We cannot avoid perceiving that the Almighty hath *set his throne for judgment*. At the same time, when we pursue our enquiries, the Almighty appears to *hold back the face of his throne, and to spread his cloud upon it* *. For in looking abroad into the world, how many scenes do we behold which are far from corresponding with any ideas we could form of the government of Heaven? Many nations of the earth we see lying in a state of barbarity and misery; sunk in such gross ignorance as degrades them below the rank of rational beings; or abandoned to be the prey of cruel oppression and tyranny. When we look to the state of individuals around us, we hear the lamentations of the unhappy on every hand. We meet with weeping parents, and mourning friends. We behold the young cut off in the flower of their days, and the aged left desolate in the midst of sorrows. The useful and virtuous are swept away, and the worth-

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* Job, xxvi. 9.



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less left to flourish. The lives of the best men are often filled with discouragements and disappointed hopes. Merit languishes in neglected solitude; and vanity and presumption gain the admiration of the world. From the scourge of calumny, and from the hand of violence, the injured look up to God as the Avenger of their cause; but often they look up in vain. He is *a God that hideth himself.* He dwelleth, as to them, in the secret place of darkness; or, if he dwelleth in light, it is in *light to which no man can approach.* Resignation may seal up their lips; but in silence they drop the tear and mourn while they adore.

SUCH, it must not be dissembled, are the difficulties which encounter us when we attempt to trace the present ways of God. At the same time, upon reflection, we may be satisfied that causes can be assigned for things appearing in this unfavourable light; and that there is no reason to be surprised at the divine conduct being mysterious at present.

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The monarchy of the universe is a great and complicated system. It comprehends numberless generations of men, who are brought forth to act their parts for purposes unknown to us. It includes two worlds at once; the world that now is, and which is only a small portion of existence; and a world that is to come, which endures for eternity. To us, no more than the beginnings of things are visible. We see only some broken parts of a great whole. We trace but a few links of that chain of being, which, by secret connections, binds together the present and the future. Such knowledge is afforded us as is sufficient for supplying the exigencies and wants of our present state; but it does no more. Peeping abroad from a dark corner of the universe, we attempt in vain to explore the counsels that govern the world. It is an attempt to sound an unfathomable deep with a scanty line; and with a feeble wing to ascend above the stars. In any complicated work, even of human art, it is found necessary to be acquainted with the design of the whole, in order to judge of

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of the fitness of its parts. In a scheme so complex as the administration of the world, where all the parts refer to one another, and where what is seen is often subordinate to what is invisible, how is it possible but our judgments must be often erroneous, and our complaints ill-founded? If a peasant or a cottager be incapable of judging of the government of a mighty empire, is it surprising that we should be at a loss concerning the conduct of the Almighty towards his creatures? *What I do, thou knowest not now.*

But, on this argument still more can be said for our satisfaction. We are to observe, that complete information respecting the ways of God, not only was not to be expected here; but, moreover, that it would have been hurtful, if granted to us in our present state. It would have proved inconsistent with that state; with the actions which we have to perform in it, and the duties we have to fulfil. It would indeed have overthrown the whole design of our being placed in this world. We are placed here under

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der the trial of our virtue. Ignorance of the events that are ordained to befal us, ignorance of the plans and decrees of Heaven, enter necessarily into a state of trial. In order to exercise both our intellectual and moral powers, and to carry them forward to improvement, we must be left to find our way in the midst of difficulties and doubts, of hardships and sufferings. We must be taught to act our part with constancy, though the reward of our constancy be distant. We must learn to bear with patience whatever our Creator judges proper to lay upon us, though we see not the reason of the hardships he inflicts. If we were let into the secret of the whole plan of Providence; if the justice of Heaven were, in every step of its procedure, made manifest to our view, man would no longer be the creature he now is, nor would his present state answer any purpose of discipline or trial.

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Mystery and darkness, therefore, must of necessity now take place in the course of things. Our present state can be no other than a state of twilight or dawn, where

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where dubious forms shall often present themselves to us, and where we shall find ourselves in a middle condition between complete light and total darkness. Had we enjoyed no evidence of a just Judge ruling the earth, and of his providence interposing in our affairs, virtue would have been altogether deprived of its encouragement and support. Had the evidence, on the other hand, been so strong as to place the hand of the Almighty constantly before our eyes, the intention of our present existence would have been defeated, and no trial of virtue have remained. Instead, therefore, of complaining of the obscurity which at present covers the conduct of Providence, we see that, on the whole, we have reason to submit and adore.

II. The text suggests that, though what God is doing, or what he intends to do, we *know not now*, yet there is ground to believe, that at some future period we shall receive information. *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* The question here arises, what that

*hereafter*

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*hereafter* is, to which we are to look for the solution of our present doubts? SERMON IX.

In the first place, *hereafter* may, on some occasions, refer to the subsequent course of events in this world. It often happens that the consequences of things throw light on the designs of God. The history of Providence, in proportion as it advances, disembroils itself. Though our present condition forbids extensive and complete information, yet as much is sometimes allowed to appear as gives us favourable openings into the righteous and benevolent counsels of Heaven.—Thus in the public affairs of the world it has been frequently seen, that from the most unpromising causes important and beneficent effects have, in the sequel, arisen. In our own country, at one period, the violent passions of a prince gave beginning to the Reformation. At another period arbitrary attempts against religion and liberty occasioned that happy Revolution which has formed the æra of national prosperity. In many instances, *the wrath of man* has been made to *praise God.* Those wars

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wars and commotions that shake the moral world have answered similar purposes with tempests in the natural world, of purging the air from noxious vapours, and restoring it to a temperature more sound and wholesome. From the midst of confusion, order has been made to spring; and from temporary mischief, lasting advantages to arise.——In all cases of this nature, with which sacred and civil history abounds, secret designs of Heaven were going on, which were unfolded in the end. The wheel was always in motion. The hand of the clock was advancing with unperceived progress, till the moment came of its striking the appointed hour.

In like manner, with respect to individuals, there is often a *hereafter* in the course of their lives, which discloses and justifies the ways of God. Not to mention the good effects which misfortunes are found to produce on the minds of men, by checking their vices and correcting their errours, innumerable exemplifications can be given, of misfortunes paving their way to future advancement in the world. We are always querulous and impatient



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when designs succeed not according to our wish. Ignorant of what futurity is to bring forward, occupied with nothing but the present, we exclaim, Where is God? Where the sceptre of righteousness? *Hath he forgotten to be gracious?* or doth he indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most high? *God seeth not as man seeth:* He looketh not merely to what you suffer, but to what the effect of these sufferings is to be. Consider only in how different a light the patriarch Joseph would view the events of his life after he had seen in what they had terminated, from the light in which he saw them, when led away by the Ishmaelites as a slave, or when thrown by Potiphar into the Egyptian prison. We murmur against Providence, just as the impetuous youth frets against his instructors and tutors, who are keeping him under a strict, and, as he thinks, a needless, discipline. He knows not that, by their instruction and discipline, they are laying the foundation of his future fortunes; of the wealth which he is to acquire, and of the advancement to which he is to rise in the world. What may

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may justly be said to him by his tutors and instructors, is equally applicable to us all under our present state of education; *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*——Regarding, then, the unknown issue of all worldly events in this life, let us never despair; let us never think dishonourably of the government of God; but have patience till his providence accomplish its designs in its own way, and at its own time. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him* *.

In the second place, The expression of *hereafter* in the text must be understood to refer, in its full extent, not to future events in this life, but to a subsequent state of being. For this life is no more than the beginning of the mighty and extensive plans of Providence. The seeds are only now sown, of what is to ripen and come forth, at the harvest of the world, when the revolution of the great moral year shall be finished, and the go-

* Job, xxxv. 14.

vernment

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vernment of God shall obtain its full completion. It is the chief scope of religion to direct our view to this period; and it hath often taught us that the knowledge of the ways of God, then enjoyed by the blessed, shall constitute a chief article of their felicity. *Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face. Now we know in part; but then we shall know even as we are known. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. In God's light we shall see light* *. The reasons that required obscurity to remain for a while on the ways of God no longer subsist. The education of good men is completed; and the intention of those steps of education, which once they could not comprehend, now becomes apparent.—Why this man was prematurely carried away from the world in the beginning of a promising course; why that deserving family were left overwhelmed with grief and despair, by the loss of one who was their sole benefactor and support; why friendships cemented by

* 1 Cor. xiii. 10. 12. Psalm xxxv. 9.



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tender ties were suddenly torn asunder by death; these are inquiries to which we can now make no reply; and which throw a dark gloom over the conduct of the Almighty. But the spirits of the just above, who are admitted to a larger view of the ways of God, see the reasons of such counsels. They see that one man was seasonably taken away from dangers and evils to come, which, unknown to him, were hovering over his head. They see that Providence was in secret preparing unexpected blessings for the family who appeared to be left disconsolate and hopeless. They see that it was time for friendships to be dissolved, when their longer continuance would to some of the parties have proved a snare. Where we behold nothing but the rod of power stretched forth, they discern an interposition of the hand of mercy.

Let us wait till this promised *hereafter* arrive, and we shall in like manner be satisfied concerning the events that now disturb and perplex us. We shall then know why so much darkness and misery have been so long permitted to remain on



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the earth, and so much oppression and tyranny to prevail among the nations. We shall see rising as from the ashes of the old world, a new and beautiful structure; *new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* As wide as is the difference between the appearance of the world, when it lay in its primitive chaos, *without form and void*, and the appearance it has now assumed, when resplendent with the light of the sun, and decked with the beauties of nature; such is the difference between the divine plans in their beginnings, and in their full completion. At the conclusion, and not till then, the glory of the Lord shall become manifest to all; and, as it is described in the book of the Revelation, a voice shall be heard *from every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, saying, Blessing and honour, and power, and glory, be to him that sitteth on the throne. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints**.

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* Rev. v. 13.—xv. 3.



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APPLICATION of the doctrines that have been illustrated may be made to two classes of men.

*First*, To sceptics; who, from the present mysterious conduct of Providence, hastily draw the conclusion, that no government is exercised over human affairs, but that all things are suffered indiscriminately to come alike to all men.—I have shewn that, from the inadequate views which we are at present able to take of the general system, such mysterious appearances of Providence must be expected to take place. Not only so, but I have also shewn it to be fit and necessary that this mixture of obscurity should now remain; as a full display of regular justice and order would be inconsistent with the moral improvement of men in this life.—Let me desire the sceptic to look to the state of the natural world. When he thinks of the order and magnificence that prevail in it, he will, perhaps, be unwilling to pronounce it the mere production of chance. He cannot but recognise the hand of intelligence, and acknowledge it to have proceeded from a designing

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ing Cause. I ask him, Whether in the natural world he discerns not as many mysterious and puzzling appearances as are to be found in the moral world? Are not destructive storms, burning mountains, uninhabitable deserts, as difficult to be reconciled to his preconceived ideas of supreme wisdom and goodness in the Creator, as the sufferings and afflictions which in the course of providence befal the just? The natural and moral world are, in this respect, counterparts to one another. Both are marked with the same characters, and carry the impress of the same powerful and gracious hand. In both, it is evidently the intention of the first Author not to render every thing level to our capacity; but in the midst of high design and order, to allow certain objects to appear, which contradict the ideas we had formed, and mock our vain researches. Now, if we are obliged to admit that the order and beauty of the natural world sufficiently prove it to be the work of a wise Creator, notwithstanding the seeming deformities which it exhibits; are we

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not led by the same train of reasoning to conclude, that the moral world is under the direction of a wise Governour, though much of what he now does we cannot satisfactorily explain.

*Secondly*, THE doctrine of the text is to be applied not only for silencing sceptics, but for comforting the pious. Never let them be dejected by the darkness which now covers the ways of the Almighty. If he withdraw himself from their view, it is not because he neglects them; but because they are incapable of comprehending his designs; because it were not for their good that all his designs were revealed to them.—Instead of perplexing themselves about what is obscure, let them rest on the clear and authentic discoveries that have been given of the Divine goodness. Let them rest on those great and signal facts that prove it; particularly on that illustrious fact, the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. He that *spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all*, will assuredly not always conceal himself from those who serve him.

Though

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Though what he does they *know not now*, the time approaches when *they shall know hereafter*. Till that time come, let them believe and trust; let them hope and adore. From this conclusion let them never depart, that to *fear God, and keep his commandments*, is in every situation the truest wisdom; that if there be government in the universe at all, the virtuous and the worthy are loved and protected by Heaven: that in *due season they shall reap if they faint not; for the care of them is with the Lord, and their reward with the Most High.*



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# SERMON X.

## On the SLAVERY of VICE.

2 PETER, ii. 19.

*While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*

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BONDAGE and subjection are disagreeable sounds to the ear, disagreeable ideas to the mind. The advocates of vice, taking advantage of those natural impressions, have in every age employed them for discrediting religion. They represent it as the bondage and confinement of the free-born soul of man; as a state of perpetual constraint, formed by

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by a system of severe rules, which designing men have contrived to impose as fetters on the multitude. On the other hand, they paint a licentious course to themselves, and hold it out to the world, as the gay and pleasurable enjoyment of life; where, having surmounted the prejudices of education, and the timorous scruples of conscience, men can think and act at pleasure, and give full scope to every wish of the heart.—But what if those pretended sons of freedom be themselves held in miserable subjection, and their boasts of liberty be no more than the *swelling words of vanity?* The apostle asserts in the Text that, while they *promise liberty* to others, they are the *servants*, or slaves of *corruption, overcome and brought into bondage by it.* This assertion of the Apostle I purpose to illustrate. I shall endeavour to make it appear, that no true liberty can arise from vice; that bad men undergo the worst servitude; and that no one is free, but he who is virtuous and good.

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It is necessary to begin with removing false ideas of liberty, and shewing in what it

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it truly consists. We are not to imagine that to be free, imports our being set loose from restraint or rule of every kind. No man, in any condition of life, is at liberty to act always as he pleases, and to gratify every wish he forms. The nature of the human state necessarily imposes on all men various restraints. The laws of society allow no one to indulge himself in pursuits or pleasures that are injurious to his neighbour. Even our own nature limits our pleasures within certain bounds. All our desires cannot be gratified together. They frequently interfere, and require him who would indulge one favourite passion, to deny himself in another. Distinctions, therefore, must be made, preferences be given, and some general regulations of conduct be observed, by every one who consults his own welfare. If there be any regulation which ensures us of safety and happiness, to be disengaged from the observance of that regulation is no article of liberty; at least of such liberty as a wise man would wish to enjoy. It is in effect to be turned loose to our own ruin. It is such liberty as a blind man enjoys, of

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of wandering at random, and striking into every devious path, without a guide to direct his steps, and save him from destruction. SERMON X.

That unbounded licentiousness, therefore, which sinners prefer to every regulation of conduct, is altogether different from true freedom. It is in moral behaviour the same as anarchy is in a state, where law and order are extinct. Anarchy, surely, is no less incompatible with true liberty than absolute despotism; and of the two it is hard to say which is the least eligible, or the most miserable state. Liberty by no means supposes the absence of all government. It only supposes that the government under which we are placed is wise; and that the restraints to which we voluntarily submit ourselves have been contrived for the general interest.

To be free, therefore, imports, in general, our being placed in such circumstances, that, within the bounds of justice and good order, we can act according to our own deliberate choice, and take such measures for our conduct as we have reason to believe are conducive to our welfare; without

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without being obstructed either by external force, or by violent internal impulse. This is that happy and dignified state which every wise Man earnestly wishes to enjoy. The advantages which result from it are chiefly these three: freedom of choice; independence of mind; boldness and security. In opposition to these distinguishing characters of liberty, I now proceed to shew that, in the first place, vice deprives bad men of free choice in their actions; that, in the second place, it brings them under a slavish dependence on external circumstances; and that, in the third place, it reduces them to that abject, cowardly, and disquieted state which is essentially characteristic of bondage.

I. Vice is inconsistent with liberty, as it deprives sinners of the power of free choice, by bringing them under the dominion of passions and habits. Religion and virtue address themselves to reason. They call us to look round on every side; to think well of the consequences of our actions; and, before we take any step of importance,



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to compare the good with the evil that may ensue from it. He therefore, who follows their dictates, acts the part of a man who freely consults, and chooses, for his own interest. But vice can make no pretensions of this kind. It awaits not the test of deliberate comparison and choice; but overpowers us at once by some striking impression of present advantage or enjoyment. It hurries us with the violence of passion; captivates us by the allurements of pleasure; or dazzles us by the glare of riches. The sinner yields to the impulse, merely because he cannot resist it. Reason remonstrates; conscience endeavours to check him; but all in vain. Having once allowed some strong passion to gain the ascendant, he has thrown himself into the middle of a torrent, against which he may some times faintly struggle, but the impetuosity of the stream bears him along. In this situation he is so far from being free, that he is not master of himself. He does not go, but is driven; tossed, agitated and impelled; passive, like a ship to the violence of the waves.



After passion has for a while exercised its

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its tyrannical sway, its vehemence may by degrees subside. But when, by long indulgence, it has established habits of gratification, the sinner's bondage becomes then more confirmed, and more miserable. For, during the heat of pursuit, he is little capable of reflection. But when his ardour is abated, and, nevertheless, a vicious habit rooted, he has full leisure to perceive the heavy yoke he has brought upon himself. How many slaves do we see in the world to intemperance, and all kinds of criminal pleasure, merely through the influence of customs, which they had allowed to become so inveterate that it was not in their power to alter them? Are they not often reduced to a condition so wretched, that when their licentious pleasures have become utterly insipid, they are still forced to continue them, solely because they cannot refrain; not because the indulgence gives them pleasure, but because abstinence would give them pain; and this too, even when they are obliged at last to condemn their habits of life, as injuring their fortune, impairing their constitution, or disgracing their character?

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ter? Vice is not of such a nature that we can say to it, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.* Having once entered into its territories, it is not in our power to make a retreat when we please. *He that committeth sin, is the servant of sin.* No man who has once yielded up the government of his mind, and given loose rein to his desires and passions, can tell how far these may carry him. He may be brought into such a desperate state, that nothing shall remain for him but to look back with regret upon the forsaken path of innocence and liberty; and, severely conscious of the thraldom he suffers, to groan under fetters which he despairs of throwing off. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil**. SERMON X

Vice confirms its dominion, and extends it still farther over the soul, by compelling the sinner to support one crime by means of another. Not only is he enslaved to those vices which take their rise from his own inclination, but they render

* Jeremiah, xiii. 23.

others

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others necessary, to which, against his inclination, he must submit; and thereby strengthen the commanding power of iniquity within him. The immoderate love of pleasure, for instance, leads him into expence beyond his fortune. In order to support that expence, he is obliged to have recourse to low and dishonourable methods of gain, which originally he despised. To cover these, he is forced upon arts of dissimulation and fraud. One instance of fraud obliges him to support it by another; till, in the end, there arises a character of complicated vice; of luxury shooting forth into baseness, dishonesty, injustice, and perhaps cruelty. It is thus that one favourite passion brings in a tribe of auxiliaries to complete the dominion of sin. Among all our corrupt passions there is a strong and intimate connection. When any one of them is adopted into our family, it never quits us until it has fathered upon us all its kindred.——By such means as these, by the violence of passions, by the power of habits, and by the connection of one vice with another, sin establishes that servitude over

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over the will, which deprives bad men of all power of free choice in their actions. SERMON X.

II. THE slavery produced by vice appears in the dependence under which it brings the sinner to circumstances of external fortune. One of the favourite characters of liberty is, the independence it bestows. He who is truly a free man is above all servile compliances, and abject subjection. He is able to rest upon himself; and while he regards his superiours with proper deference, neither debases himself by cringing to them, nor is tempted to purchase their favour by dishonourable means. But the sinner has forfeited every privilege of this nature. His passions and habits render him an absolute dependant on the world, and the world's favour; on the uncertain goods of fortune, and the fickle humours of men. For it is by these he subsists, and among these his happiness is sought; according as his passions determine him to pursue pleasure, riches, or preferments. Having no fund within himself whence to draw enjoyment, his only resource is in things with-



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out. His hopes and fears all hang upon the world. He partakes in all its vicissitudes; and is moved and shaken by every wind of fortune. This is to be, in the strictest sense, a slave to the world.

Religion and virtue, on the other hand, confer on the mind, principles of noble independence. *The upright man is satisfied from himself.* He despises not the advantages of fortune; but he centers not his happiness in them. With a moderate share of them, he can be contented; and contentment is felicity. Happy in his own integrity, conscious of the esteem of good men, reposing firm trust in the providence, and the promises of God, he is exempted from servile dependence on other things. He can wrap himself up in a good conscience, and look forward, without terrour, to the change of the world. Let all things shift around him as they please, he believes that, by the divine ordination, they shall be made *to work together* in the issue *for his good:* And therefore, having much to hope from God, and little to fear from the world, he can be easy in every state. One who

possesses

possesses within himself such an establishment of mind, is truly free.—But shall I call that man free, who has nothing that is his own, nor property assured; whose very heart is not his own, but rendered the appendage of external things, and the sport of fortune? Is that man free, let his outward condition be ever so splendid, whom his imperious passions detain at their call, whom they send forth at their pleasure to drudge and toil, and to beg his only enjoyment from the casualties of the world? Is he free, who must flatter and lie, to compass his ends; who must bear with this man's caprice, and that man's scorn; must profess friendship where he hates, and respect where he contemns; who is not at liberty to appear in his own colours, nor to speak his own sentiments; who dares not be honest, lest he should be poor?——Believe it, no chains bind so hard, no fetters are so heavy, as those which fasten the corrupted heart to this treacherous world; no dependence is more contemptible than that under which the voluptuous, the covetous, or the ambitious man lies, to the means of pleasure,

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gain, or power. Yet this is the boasted liberty, which vice promises, as the recompence of setting us free from the salutary restraints of virtue.

III. ANOTHER character of the slavery of vice, is that mean, cowardly, and disquieted state to which it reduces the sinner. Boldness and magnanimity have ever been accounted the native effects of liberty. He who enjoys it, having nothing to apprehend from oppressive power, performs the offices, and enjoys the comforts of life, with a manly and undisturbed mind. Hence his behaviour is dignified, and his sentiments are honourable; while he who is accustomed to bend under servile subjection, has always been found mean-spirited, timorous, and base.—Compare, in these respects, the virtuous and the vicious man, and you will easily see to which of them the characteristics of freedom most justly belong. The man of virtue, relying on a good conscience and the protection of Heaven, acts with firmness and courage; and, in the discharge of his duty, fears not the face of man. The man of vice, conscious

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conscious of his low and corrupt aims, shrinks before the stedfast and piercing eye of integrity; is ever looking around him with anxious and fearful circumspection, and thinking of subterfuges, by which he may escape from danger. The one is *bold as a lion*; the other *flieth when no man pursueth.* To the one, nothing appears contemptible, by which he can procure any present advantage. The other looks with disdain on whatever would degrade his character. "I will not," says he, "so demean myself, as to catch the "favour of the greatest man, by this or "that low art. It shall not be said or "thought of me, that I did what was base, "in order to make my fortune. Let "others stoop so low, who cannot be "without the favours of the world. But I "can want them, and therefore at such a "price I will not purchase them." This is the voice of true liberty; and speaks that greatness of mind which it is formed to inspire.

Corresponding to that abject disposition which characterises a bad man, are the fears that haunt him. The terrours of a



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slave dwell on his mind, and often appear in his behaviour. For guilt is never free from suspicion and alarm. The sinner is afraid, sometimes, of the partners of his crimes, lest they betray him; sometimes, of those who have suffered by his crimes, lest they revenge themselves; frequently, of the world around him, lest it detect him; and, what is worst of all, he is reduced to be afraid of himself. There is a witness within him, that testifies against his misdeeds; and threatens him in secret, when other alarms leave him. Conscience holds up to his view the image of his past crimes, with this inscription engraved upon it, "*God will bring every* "*work into judgment.*" How opposite is such a state as this, to the peaceful security arising from the liberty enjoyed by the virtuous? —— Were there nothing more in the circumstances of sinners to affix upon them the marks of servitude, this alone would be sufficient, that, as the scripture expresses it, *through fear of death they are all their lifetime subject to bondage* *,

* Heb. ii. 15.

Death

Death sets all other captives free. The slave who digs in the mine, or labours at the oar, can rejoice at the prospect of laying down his burden together with his life; and tastes the hope of being at last on equal terms with his cruel oppressor. But, to the slave of guilt there arises no hope from death. On the contrary, he is obliged to look forward with constant terrour to this most certain of all events, as the conclusion of all his hopes and the commencement of his greatest miseries.

I HAVE thus set before you such clear and unequivocal marks of the servitude undergone by sinners, as fully verify the assertion in the text, that a state of vice and corruption is a state of bondage. In order to perceive how severe a bondage it is, let us attend to some peculiar circumstances of aggravation which belong to it.

First, It is a bondage to which the mind itself, the native seat of liberty, is subjected. In other cases, a brave man can comfort himself with reflecting that, let



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tyrants do their worst, let prisons or fetters be his lot, his mind remains unconquered and free. Of this liberty, they cannot rob him; here he moves in a higher sphere, above the reach of oppression or confinement. But what avails the show of external liberty, to one who has lost the government of himself? As our Saviour reasons in another case, *If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?* So we may reason here, if that part of thy nature, thy mind, thy will, by which only thou canst enjoy and relish liberty, be itself in bondage to evil passions and habits, how miserable must be that bondage?

Next, it is aggravated by this consideration, that it is a bondage which we have brought upon ourselves. To have been forced into slavery, is misfortune and misery. But to have renounced our liberty and chosen to be slaves, is the greatest reproach added to the greatest misery. Moments there frequently must be, when a sinner is sensible of the degradation of his state; when he feels with pain the slavish

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slavish dependence under which he is brought to fortune and the world, to violent passions and settled habits, and to fears and apprehensions arising from conscious guilt. In such moments, how cruel is the reflection, that of all this disgrace and misery he has been the author to himself; that, by voluntary compliance, he has given to his passions that haughty ascendant which they now exercise over him; has forged the chains with which he is bound, and sold himself to do iniquity?



Lastly, The servitude of vice is accompanied with this farther aggravation, that it is subjection to our own servants. Those desires and passions which the sinner has raised to lawless rule, were given us as instruments of self-preservation; but were plainly designed to be under the direction of a higher power. Of themselves, they are headstrong and blind; they bear all the marks of intended subordination; and conscience is invested with every ensign of authority and supremacy. But sin inverts the whole frame of human nature. It compels reason to bow down before

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those intermediate stages, in one of which you are now perhaps found. Vice always creeps by degrees; and insensibly twines around us those concealed fetters by which we are at last completely bound. — As you value therefore your liberty and your happiness, avoid every approach to evil. Consider all vicious pleasures as enchanted ground, by entering on which, you will be farther and farther ensnared within the magic circle, till at length you are precluded from all retreat. The most pure and virtuous man is always the freest. The religion of Christ is justly entitled the *perfect law of liberty* *. It is only when the *Son makes us free*, that *we are free indeed:* and it was with reason the Psalmist said, *I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts* †.

* James, i. 25. † Pſalm cxix. 45.

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# SERMON XI.

## On the IMPORTANCE of PUBLIC WORSHIP.

PSALM xvi. 8.

*Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*

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GOD *is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* That religion chiefly consists in an inward principle of goodness, is beyond dispute, and that its value and efficacy are derived from its effects in purifying the heart, and reforming the life. All external services, which have not this tendency, are entirely insignificant. They



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degenerate into mere superstition, equally unacceptable to God, and unprofitable to man. Hence they are so often treated in scripture, with high contempt, when substituted in the room of the important duties of a virtuous life.

Notwithstanding this, it is certain that external services have their own place, and a considerable one too, in the system of religion. What their proper place is, no one can be at a loss to discern, who will only make a just distinction between the means, and the end, in religion. It is evident there is danger in man's erring here, either on one side or other; and it is certain that they have erred on both. After it was observed, that mankind were prone to lay too much weight on the external parts of religion, it began to be thought that no weight was to be allowed to them at all. The time was, when all religion centered in attending the duties of the church, and paying veneration to whatever was accounted sacred. This alone sanctified the character, and compensated every blemish in moral conduct. From this extreme the spirit of the age seems to be

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be running fast into the opposite extreme, of holding every thing light that belongs to public worship. But if superstition be an evil, and a very great one it undoubtedly is, irreligion is not a smaller evil: And though the *form of godliness* may often remain when the *power* of it is wanting; yet the *power* cannot well subsist where the *form* is altogether gone. — The holy Psalmist, whose words are now before us, discovers much better principles. Expressing always the highest regard for the laws of God, and the precepts of virtue, he breathes at the same time a spirit of pure devotion. Though loaded with the cares of royalty, and encircled with the splendour of a court, he thought it well became him to shew respect to the great Lord of nature; and on many occasions expresses as he does in the text, his delight in the public service of the temple. *Lord I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.* In discoursing from which words I purpose to shew the importance of the public worship of God, and the benefits resulting from it. I shall consider it in

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three lights; as it respects God; as it respects the world; as it respects ourselves.

I. LET us consider it with respect to God. If there exist a Supreme Being, the Creator of the world, no consequence appears more natural and direct than this, that he ought to be worshipped by his creatures, with every outward expression of submission and honour. We need only appeal to every man's heart, whether this be not a principle which carries along with it its own obligation, that to Him who is the Fountain of our life and the Father of our mercies; to Him who has raised up that beautiful structure of the universe in which we dwell, and where we are surrounded with so many blessings and comforts; solemn acknowledgments of gratitude should be made, praises and prayers should be offered, and all suitable marks of dependence on him be expressed. — This obligation extends beyond the silent and secret sentiments of our hearts. Besides private devotion, it naturally leads to associations for public worship;

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ship; to open and declared professions of respect for the Deity. Where blessings are received in common, an obligation lies upon the community, jointly to acknowledge them. Sincere gratitude is always of an open and diffusive nature. It loves to pour itself forth; to give free vent to its emotions; and, before the world, to ackdowledge and honour the Benefactor. SERMON XI

So consonant is this to the natural sentiments of mankind, that all the nations of the earth have, as with one consent, agreed to institute some forms of worship; to hold meetings at certain times, in honour of their deities. Survey the societies of men in their rudest state; explore the African deserts, the wilds of America, or the distant islands of the ocean; and you will find that over all the earth some religious ceremonies have obtained. You will every where trace, in one form or other, the temple, the priest, and the offering. The prevalence of the most absurd superstitions furnishes this testimony to the truth, that in the hearts of all men the principle is engraved, of worship being



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due to that invisible Power who rules the world.—Herein consists the great excellency of the Christian religion, that it hath instructed us in the simple and spiritual nature of that worship. Disencumbered of idle and unmeaning ceremonies, its ritual is pure, and worthy of a Divine Author. Its positive institutions are few in number, most significant of spiritual things, and directly conducive to good life and practice. How inexcusable then are we, if placed in such happy circumstances, the sense of those obligations to the public worship of God shall be obliterated among us, which the light of nature inculcated, in some measure, on the most wild and barbarous nations!

The refinements of false philosophy have indeed suggested this shadow of objection, that God is too great to stand in need of any external service from his creatures; that our expressions of praise and honour are misplaced with respect to Him, who is above all honour and all praise; that in his sight, the homage we seek to pay must appear contemptible; and is therefore in itself superfluous and trifling.



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fling.——But who hath taught those vain reasoners, that all expressions of gratitude and honour towards a superiour become unsuitable, merely because that superiour needs not any returns? Were they ever indebted to one whose favours they had it not in their power to repay; and did they, on that account, feel themselves set loose from every obligation to acknowledge, and to praise their benefactor? On the contrary, the more disinterested his beneficence was, did not gratitude, in any ingenuous mind, burn with the greater ardour, and prompt them the more eagerly to seize every opportunity of publicly testifying the feelings of their hearts?—— Almighty God, it is true, is too great to need our service or homage. But he is also too good not to accept it, when it is the native expression of a grateful and generous mind. If pride and self-sufficiency stifle all sentiments of dependence on our Creator; if levity, and attachment to worldly pleasures, render us totally neglectful of expressing our thankfulness to Him for his blessings; do we not hereby discover such a want of proper feeling,

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such a degree of hardness and corruption in our affections, as shows us to be immoral and unworthy; and must justly expose us to the high displeasure of Heaven? On the contrary, according to every notion which we can form of the Father of the universe, must it not be acceptable to him to behold his creatures properly affected in heart towards their great Benefactor; assembling together to express, in acts of worship, that gratitude, love, and reverence which they owe him; and thus nourishing and promoting in one another an affectionate sense of his goodness? Are not such dispositions, and such a behaviour as this, intimately connected with all virtue?

*O come, let us worship and bow down! let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the flock of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. The prayer of the upright is his delight. It cometh before him as incense, and the uplifting of their hands as the evening sacrifice.*——

Having thus shewn the reasonableness of public

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public worship with respect to God, let us now, SERMON XI.

II. CONSIDER its importance in another view, as it respects the world. When we survey the general state of mankind, we find them continually immersed in worldly affairs; busied about providing the necessaries of life, occupied in the pursuits of their pleasures, or eagerly prosecuting the advancement of their interests. In such a situation of things, a small measure of reflection might convince any one, that without some returns of sacred days, and some solemn calls to public worship, it were impossible to preserve in the world any sense of objects, so foreign to the general current of thought, as an invisible Governour, and a future state. If it be of importance to the peace and good order of society, that there should prevail among men the belief of One in the heavens, who is the protector of righteousness and the avenger of crimes; if it be of importance that they be taught to look forward to a day of judgment, when they are to be brought to account for their



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most secret actions, and eternally rewarded or punished, according as their conduct has been good or evil; if such principles as these, I say, be of consequence to the public welfare, they certainly enforce the authority of public worship, and prove the necessity of religious instruction.

I speak now particularly with a view to the multitude, the great mass and body of the people. We all know, how seldom from education, or private instruction, they have the advantage of deriving sentiments of religion or morality. Early obliged to labour for their bread, they would remain all their days in gross ignorance of every moral or sacred principle, were it not for those public assemblies in which they hear of God, and Christ, and judgment, and heaven, and hell. Shut up those temples to which they resort with reverence; exclude them from the opportunities they now possess of receiving religious instruction, and imbibing religious ideas; and what can you expect them to become? No other than a ferocious rabble, who, set free from checks of conscience,

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conscience, and fears of divine vengeance, would be prone to every outrage which they could commit with impunity. It is well known, that in the early ages of the world, sages and legislators who endeavoured to tame and to associate the barbarous hordes of men, found it necessary for this purpose to have recourse to religion. By bringing the rude multitudes to worship together, and, at stated times and places, to join in hymns and songs to their deities, they gradually restrained them from violence, and trained them to subordination and civilized life. SERMON XI.

During the progress of society in after-periods, religious assemblies at church continue, I am persuaded, to have a very considerable influence on the civilization and improvement of the people. Even independent of effect upon the moral principles, by leading numbers of them to meet together in an orderly way, and in their most decent appearance, they tend to humanize and polish their manners. They strengthen the social connections, and promote friendly intercourse among those who are in the same neighbourhood, and in the



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same lines of life. It must, at the same time, be agreeable to every humane mind to think, that one day in seven is allotted for rest to the poor from their daily labours, and for such enjoyments of ease and comfort as their station affords. It is the only day which gives them occasion to feel themselves as belonging to the same class of beings with their superiours; when joining with them in the same acts of worship, and recognizing a common Lord. Amidst those distinctions which the difference of ranks necessarily introduces into human society, it is surely fit that there be some occasions when man can meet with man as a brother, in order that the pride of the great may be checked; and the low may be taught that, if they discharge properly their appointed part, they have reason to expect from the Lord of the universe, the same rewards with the rich and the mighty.

It will, I believe, be generally admitted, that forms of public worship, and means of religious instruction, are important, on several accounts, for the body of the

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the people, and belong to the maintenance of public safety and order. But many who admit this, are apt to think, that to the common people alone they may be left. To persons of liberal education and enlarged minds, what benefit can arise from hearing what they already know; and what, perhaps, is to be inculcated on them by those who are of inferiour capacity to themselves?——Admitting this plea of superiority which their vanity forms, and setting aside for the present any personal obligation they are under to worship God, I must ask such persons, how they can expect that religious assemblies will be long respected by the lower ranks of men, if by men of rank and education they are discountenanced and forsaken? Do not they know, that those lower ranks are ready to copy the manners, and to follow the example, of their superiours in all things; but assuredly in nothing more than in what appears to set them free from restraint, and to gratify licentiousness? While they acknowledge the importance, and even the necessity, of public religion to certain classes of men, do they never-

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nevertheless contribute by their behaviour to defeat the end of public religion, and to annihilate that importance which they ascribe to it? —— They are employed in framing laws and statutes for preventing crimes, and keeping the disorderly multitude within bounds; and at the same time, by personally discountenancing public worship, they are weakening, they are even abolishing, among the multitude, that moral restraint, which is of more general influence upon manners than all the laws they frame. In vain they complain of the dishonesty of servants, of the insolence of mobs, of the attacks of the highwayman. To all these disorders they have themselves been accessory. By their own disregard of sacred institutions, they have disseminated profligacy among the people. They have broken down the floodgates which served to restrain the torrent; they have let it loose to overflow the land; and by the growing deluge may themselves be swept away. —— But I must next argue upon a different ground; and proceed,

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III. To set forth the importance of the public worship of God to every individual in every rank of life. Whatever his station be, he is still a man; and has the duties of a man to perform. Were his attendance on divine worship of no other effect, than to add countenance to a salutary institution, this alone would render it his duty. But moreover, we assert it to be his duty on his own account; if it be the duty of every man to use the proper means of preserving and fortifying his virtue. All the Christian institutions have a direct tendency to this end. They all serve to give warmth to piety, and to add solemnity to moral virtue. A very high opinion, indeed, that man must have of his own character, who imagines that, amidst all the follies and corruptions of the world, he stands in need of no assistance for enabling him to act his part with propriety and dignity.

The question is not, Whether persons of rank and education are to learn any thing that is new to them, by frequenting the places of public worship? The great principles of piety and morality are obvious and easily known; and we shall readily admit,

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admit, that there are many to whom no new instruction is communicated in the house of God. But, my friends, the purpose of your going there is to have known truths recalled to your mind, and their dormant influence awakened; is to have serious meditations suggested; to have good dispositions raised; to have the heart adjusted to a composed and tranquil frame. Is there any man of reason and reflection, who will not acknowledge such effects, as far as they follow from attendance on religious ordinances, to be of the most beneficial nature? These occasional cessations from the cares and anxieties of life, these interruptions to the bustle and the passions of the world, in order to think and hear of eternity, are both a relief and an improvement to the mind. By this retreat from its ordinary circle of thoughts, it is enabled to return, with more clearness and more vigour, to the business of the world, after a serious and proper pause.

But I must ask the persons with whom I now reason, whether there be no other call to come to God's house, than to hear instruction there? Is not the devout adoration

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ration of the God of heaven the principal object of our religious assemblies; and is this what any man of reflection, and of sober mind, dare to make light of? In the temple of the Lord, the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, appear as suppliants alike for the protection and favour of the Almighty.—Great and flourishing as thou mayest think thyself, know that thou standest as much in need of that protection, as the meanest of the crowd whom thou beholdest worshipping, with lowly reverence, the God of their fathers. The sun of prosperity shines at present on thy head, and the favourable gale carries thee softly along the stream of life. But, the Almighty needs only to give the word, and instantly the tempest shall rise; and thy frail bark shall be driven into the ocean, and whelmed in the deep. *In my prosperity, I said I shall never be moved. Thou, Lord, didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.* Look up, with dread to that awful hand of Providence which is stretched over your heads. Remember the instability of all human things; remember it, and tremble, ye who despise the devout acknowledgment of him who

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disposes of the human fate! *Though ye live many years and rejoice in them all, remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many* *.

But after all that has been urged on this subject, I am sensible it may be objected, that many who make conscience of paying strict regard to the institutions of religion, do not appear to have derived much benefit from them. They are not, it will be said, more improved in moral conduct, and in the proper discharge of the several duties of life, than others who have been apparently negligent of the services of the church. On the contrary, a formal regard to these appears to be substituted by many, in the room of the weightier matters of the law.— Though this should be admitted, it goes no farther than to shew that human weakness, or corruption, may defeat the purpose of the most promising means of moral improvement. That a superstitious attention to external worship, has too often usurped the character and supplanted the place, of real virtue, will not be denied. Admonitions against so dangerous an errour cannot

* Eccles. xi. 8.

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be given too often. But because the best things have been often misapplied and abused, no argument thence arises for their being undervalued, and thrown aside. So also reason, instruction, and discipline of every kind, have been frequently perverted to bad ends; and yet their intrinsic worth and usefulness remain untouched, and acknowledged.——Besides this, it cannot be admitted that, because religious institutions produce not all the good that might be wished, and hoped for, they therefore do no good at all. This were a rash and ill-founded conclusion. If the morals of men are not always amended by them as they ought to have been, there is reason, however, to think that they would have been worse without them. Some check is always given by them to open profligacy. Some assistance is furnished to good dispositions of heart; at least, to decency of manners. Even momentary impressions of seriousness made on the thoughtless by the solemnities of religion, are not without their fruit. They leave generally some trace behind them; and when the traces are often renewed, they may be hoped, through the divine

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divine blessing, to form at last a deep impression on the mind.

At the same time, I do not say that religious institutions work upon the mind like a charm; and that mere bodily attendance on them will always ensure us of some profitable effect. Let the means that are employed, for the improvement of rational beings, be ever so powerful in themselves, much of their success will always depend on the manner in which they are received and applied. I shall therefore conclude my reasonings on this subject, with a few observations concerning the dispositions requisite on our part, for deriving benefit from the public ordinances of religion.

THE ends for which we assemble in the house of God, are two; to worship God, and to listen to religious instructions.

The public worship of God is the chief and most sacred purpose of every religious assembly of Christians. Let it here be remembered, that it is not the uttering, or the hearing of certain words, that constitutes the worship of the Almighty. It is the heart that praises or prays. If the heart accompany

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pany not the words that are spoken or heard, we *offer the sacrifice of fools*. By the inattentive thought, and the giddy and wandering eye, we profane the temple of the Lord, and turn the appearance of devotion into insult and mockery.

With regard to religious instruction, attention and reverence are unquestionably due. All religious and moral knowledge comes from God. It is a light from heaven, first transmitted to man by the original constitution of his nature, and afterwards made to shine with fairer and fuller lustre by the revelation of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Its brightness may sometimes be stronger, and sometimes weaker, according to the mediums by which it is conveyed. But still, as far as the instructions delivered from the pulpit are illuminated by the ray from heaven, they are the truths of God, and ought to be received as such. Refinements of vain philosophy, or intricate subtilties of theological controversy, are undoubtedly not entitled to such regard. But when the great principles of natural or revealed religion are discussed; when the important doctrines of the gospel concerning the life,



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and sufferings, and death of our blessed Redeemer are displayed; or useful instructions regarding the regulation of life, and the proper discharge of our several duties, are the subjects brought into view; it is not then the human speaker, but the divine authority, that is to be regarded.

In the speaker, many imperfections and infirmities may be discovered. The discoveries of the Gospel are represented in scripture, as a hidden treasure brought to light; but, by the appointment of God, *we have this treasure in earthen vessels* *. It is not the spirit of curiosity that ought to bring us to church. Too often, it is to be feared, we assemble there merely as critics on the preacher; critics on his sentiments, his language, and his delivery. But, such are not the dispositions which become us on so serious an occasion. It is with humility, with fairness, and candour, with an intention to improve ourselves in piety and virtue, with a view to make personal application to our own character, that we ought to hear the word of God. —— When we enter the sacred temple, let us ever consider

* 2 Corinth. iv. 7.

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ourselves as creatures surrounded with darkness, seeking illumination from Heaven; as guilty creatures, imploring forgiveness from our judge; as frail and mortal creatures, preparing for that eternal habitation into which we know not how soon we are to pass.

If with such sentiments and impressions we join in the worship of God, and the ordinances of religion, we may justly hope that they shall be accompanied to us with the divine blessing. It is the express precept of God, *not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together* *. *Gather together the people, men, women, and children, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law* †. *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name.*— Thus hath God commanded, and he never commanded his people to seek his name in vain. For, *where two or three are gathered together in his name, our Lord hath told us*

* Heb. x. 25. † Deut. xxxi. 12.



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*that he is in the midst of them* *. *God hath said, that he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob* †. *The prayer of the upright is his delight.* Both in their temporal and spiritual concerns, they may be most expected to prosper, who can say with the Psalmist in the text, *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*

* Matth. xviii. 20. † Ps. lxxxvii. 2.

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# SERMON XII.

## On the FASHION of the WORLD passing away.

1 COR. vii. 31.

—*The fashion of this world passeth away.*

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TO *use this world* so as not to *abuse it*, is one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most difficult lessons which religion teaches. By so many desires and passions we are connected with the objects around us, that our attachment to them is always in hazard of becoming excessive and sinful. Hence religion is often employed in moderating this attachment, by rectifying our erroneous opinions, and instructing us in the



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proper value we ought to set on worldly things. Such was particularly the scope of the Apostle in this context. He is putting the Corinthians in mind that their *time is short*; that every thing here is transitory; and therefore, that in all the different occupations of human life, in *weeping* and *rejoicing*, and *buying* and *possessing*, they were ever to keep in view this consideration, that *the fashion of this world passeth away*. The original expression imports the figure or form under which the world presents itself to us. The meaning is All that belongs to this visible state is continually changing. Nothing in human affairs is fixed or stable. All is in motion and fluctuation; altering its appearance every moment, and passing into some new form. Let us meditate for a little on the serious view which is here given us of the world, in order that we may attend to the improvements which it suggests.

I. *The fashion of the world passeth away*, as the opinions, ideas, and manners of men are always changing. We look in vain

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vain for a standard to ascertain and fix any of these; in vain expect that what has been approved and established for a while, is always to endure. Principles which were of high authority among our ancestors are now exploded. Systems of philosophy which were once universally received, and taught as infallible truths, are now obliterated and forgotten. Modes of living, behaving, and employing time, the pursuits of the busy, and the entertainments of the gay, have been entirely changed. They were the offspring of fashion, the children of a day. When they had run their course, they expired; and were succeeded by other modes of living, and thinking, and acting, which the gloss of novelty recommended for a while to the public taste. SERMON XII.

When we read an account of the manners and occupations, of the studies and opinions, even of our own countrymen, in some remote age, we seem to be reading the history of a different world from what we now inhabit. Coming downwards, through some generations, a new face of things appears. Men begin to



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think, and act, in a different train; and what we call refinement gradually opens. Arriving at our own times, we consider ourselves as having widely enlarged the sphere of knowledge on every side; having formed just ideas on every subject; having attained the proper standard of manners and behaviour; and wonder at the ignorance, the uncouthness, and rusticity of our forefathers. But, alas! what appears to us so perfect shall in its turn pass away. The next race, while they shove us off the stage, will introduce their favourite discoveries and innovations; and what we now admire as the height of improvement, may in a few ages hence be considered as altogether rude and imperfect. As one wave effaces the ridge which the former had made on the sand by the sea-shore, so every succeeding age obliterates the opinions and modes of the age which had gone before it. *The fashion of the world* is ever passing away.

Let us only think of the changes which our own ideas and opinions undergo in the progress of life. One man differs not more from another, than the same man varies

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varies from himself in different periods of his age, and in different situations of fortune. In youth, and in opulence, every thing appears smiling and gay. We fly as on the wings of fancy; and survey beauties wherever we cast our eye. But let some more years have passed over our heads, or let disappointments in the world have depressed our spirits; and what a change takes place! The pleasing illusions that once shone before us; the splendid fabrics that imagination had reared; the enchanting maze in which we once wandered with delight, all vanish and are forgotten. The world itself remains the same. But its form, its appearance, and aspect, is changed to our view; its *fashion*, as to us, hath *passed away*.



II. While our opinions and ideas are thus changing within, the condition of all external things is, at the same time, ever changing without us, and around us. Wherever we cast our eyes over the face of nature, or the monuments of art, we discern the marks of alteration and vicissitude. We cannot travel far upon the



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earth, without being presented with many a striking memorial of the changes made by time. What was once a flourishing city, is now a neglected village. Where castles and palaces stood, fallen towers and ruined walls appear. Where the magnificence of the great shone, and the mirth of the gay resounded, there, as the prophet Isaiah describes, *the owl and the raven now dwell, thorns come up, and the nettle and the bramble grow in the courts.*——When we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of incessant revolution and change? We behold kingdoms alternately rising and falling; peace and war taking place by turns; princes, heroes, and statesmen, coming forth in succession on the stage, attracting our attention for a little by the splendid figure they make, and then disappearing and forgotten. We see the *fashion of the world* assuming all its different forms, and, in all of them, *passing away*.

But to historical annals there is no occasion for our having recourse. Let any one who has made some progress in life, recollect only what he has beheld passing before

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before him in his own time. We have seen our country rise triumphant among the nations; and we have seen it also humbled in its turn. We have seen in one hemisphere of the globe new dominions acquired, and in another hemispere, our old dominions lost. At home, we have seen factions and parties shift through all their different forms; and administrations, in succession, rise and fall. What were once the great themes of eager dicussion, and political contest are now forgotten. Fathers recount them to their children as the tales of other times. New actors have come forth on the stage of the world. New objects have attracted the attention, and new intrigues engaged the passions of men. New members fill the seats of justice; new ministers the temples of religion; and a new world, in short, in the course of a few years, has gradually and insensibly risen around us. SERMON XII.

When from the public scene we turn our eye to our own private connections, the changes which have taken place in the *fashion of the world*, must touch every reflecting

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reflecting mind with a more tender sensibility. For where are now many of the companions of our early years; many of those with whom we first began the race of life; and whose hopes and prospects were once the same with our own? In recollecting our old acquaintance and friends, what devastations have been made by the hand of time? On the ruins of our former connections, new ones have arisen; new relations have been formed; and the circle of those among whom we live is altogether changed from what it once was. Comparing our present situation with our former condition of life; looking back to our father's house, and to the scenes of youth; remembering the friends by whom we were trained, and the family in which we grew up; who but with inward emotion, recollects those days of former years, and is disposed to drop the silent tear, when he views *the fashion of the world* thus always *passing away*?

III. Not only our connections with all things around us change, but our own life,

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life, through all its stages and conditions, is ever passing away. How just, and how affecting is that image, employed in the sacred writings to describe the state of man, *we spend our years as a tale that is told*!* It is not to any thing great or lasting that human life is compared; not to a monument that is built, or to an inscription that is engraved; not even to a book that is written, or to a history that is recorded; but to *a tale*, which is listened to for a little; where the words are fugitive and passing, and where one incident succeeds and hangs on another, till by insensible transitions, we are brought to the close; *a tale*, which in some passages may be amusing, in others, tedious; but whether it amuses or fatigues, is soon told and soon forgotten. Thus, year steals upon us after year. Life is never standing still for a moment; but continually, though insensibly, sliding into a new form. Infancy rises up fast to childhood; childhood to youth; youth passes quickly into manhood; and the

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* Psalm xc 9.

grey

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grey hair and the faded look are not long of admonishing us, that old age is at hand. In this course all generations run. The world is made up of unceasing rounds of transitory existence. Some generations are coming forward into being, and others hastening to leave it. The stream which carries us all along, is ever flowing with a quick current, though with a still and noiseless course. The dwelling place of man is continually emptying, and by a fresh succession of inhabitants, continually filling anew. *The memory of man passeth away like the remembrance of a guest who hath tarried but one night.*

As the life of man, considered in its duration, thus fleets and passes away, so, during the time it lasts, its condition is perpetually changing. It affords us nothing on which we can set up our rest; no enjoyment or possession which we can properly call our own. When we have begun to be placed in such circumstances as we desired, and wish our lives to proceed in the same agreeable tenor, how often comes some unexpected event across to disconcert all our schemes of happiness?

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Our health declines; our friends die; our families are scattered; something or other is not long of occurring, to shew us that the wheel must turn round; *the fashion of the world* must *pass away.* Is there any man who dares to look to futurity with an eye of confident hope; and to say, that against a year hence, he can promise being in the same condition of health or fortune as he is at present? The seeds of change are every where sown in our state; and the very causes that seemed to promise us security, are often secretly undermining it. Great fame provokes the attacks of envy and reproach. High health gives occasion to intemperance and disease. The elevation of the mighty never fails to render their condition tottering; and that obscurity which shelters the mean, exposes them, at the same time, to become the prey of oppression. So completely is the *fashion of this world* made by Providence for change, and prepared for *passing away.* In the midst of this instability, it were some comfort, did human prosperity decay as slowly as it rises. By slow degrees, and by many intervening steps, it

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rises. But one day is sufficient to scatter and bring it to nought. I might add,

IV. THAT the world itself in which we dwell, the basis of all our present enjoyments, is itself contrived for change, and designed to pass away. While the generations of men come forth in their turns, like troops of succeeding pilgrims, to act their part on this globe, the globe on which they act is tottering under their feet. It was once overflowed by a deluge. It is shaken by earthquakes; it is undermined by subterraneous fires; it carries many a mark of having suffered violent convulsions, and of tending to dissolution. Revelation informs us that there is a day approaching, in which *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth and the works therein shall be burnt up.* When this destined hour arrives the *fashion of the world* shall have finally *past away.* Immortal spirits shall then look back upon this world, as we do at present on cities and empires, which were once mighty and

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and flourishing, but now are swept from existence, and their place is no more to be found. SERMON XII.

I SHALL insist no longer on this representation of things. Enough has been said, to show that the *fashion of the world*, in every sense, *passes away*. Opinions and manners, public affairs and private concerns, the life of man, the conditions of fortune, and the earth itself on which we dwell, are all changing around us.—Is every thing, then, with which we are connected, passing and transitory? Is the whole state of man no more than a dream or fleeting vision? Is he brought forth to be only the child of a day? Are we thrown into a river where all flows, and nothing stays; where we have no means of resisting the current; nor can reach any firm ground on which to rest our foot?—No, my brethren; man was not doomed to be so unhappy; nor made by his Creator so much in vain. There are three fixed and permanent objects to which I must now call your attention, as the great supports of human constancy amidst this fugitive state. Though

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this world changes and passes away, virtue and goodness never change; God never changes; heaven and immortality pass not away.

*First*, VIRTUE and goodness never change. Let opinions and manners, conditions and situations, in public and in private life, alter as they will, virtue is ever the same. It rests on the immoveable basis of Eternal Truth. Among all the revolutions of human things, it maintains its ground; ever possessing the veneration and esteem of mankind, and conferring on the heart, which enjoys it, satisfaction and peace. Consult the most remote antiquity. Look to the most savage nations of the earth. How wild, and how fluctuating soever the ideas of men may have been, this opinion you will find to have always prevailed, that probity, truth, and beneficence form the honour and the excellency of man. In this, the philosopher and the savage, the warrior and the hermit, join. At this altar all have worshipped. Their offerings may have been unseemly. Their notions of virtue may have been rude, and occasionally tainted.

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tainted by ignorance and superstition; but the fundamental ideas of moral worth have ever remained the same. SERMON XII.

Here then is one point of stability, affected by no vicissitudes of time and life, on which we may rest. Our fortunes may change, and our friends may die; but virtue may still be our own; and as long as this remains, we are never miserable. *Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live* *. He who, with the holy man of old, can hold this language, may with undisturbed mind survey time flying away, life decaying, and the whole fashion of the world changing around him. He hath within himself, a source of consolation and hope, independent of all earthly objects. Every terrestrial glory sparkles only for a little, with transient brightness. But virtue shines with eternal and unalterable splendour. It derives its origin from heaven; and partakes both of the lustre, and the stability, of celestial objects. *It is the bright-*

* Job, xxvii. 5. 6.



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*ness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of God, and the image of his goodness.*

In the *second* place, God never changes. Amidst the unceasing vicissitude of earthly things, there remains at the head of the universe an Eternal Protector of virtue, whose *throne is established for ever.* With him there is *no variableness, neither any shadow of turning*; no inconstancy of purpose, and no decay of wisdom or of power. We know that he loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it unalterably to the last. Foreseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages has produced. All the changes which happen in the state of nature, or the life of men, were comprehended in his decree. How much soever worldly things may change in themselves, they are all united in his plan; they constitute one great system or whole, of which he is the Author; and which, at its final completion, shall appear to be perfect. His dominion holds together, in a continued chain, the successive variety of human events; gives stability to things that in themselves are



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fluctuating; gives constancy even to the *fashion of the world* while it is *passing away*. Wherefore, though all things change on earth, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as, with trust and hope, we look up to the Supreme Being, we rest on the *rock of ages*, and are safe amidst every change. We possess a fortress to which we can have recourse in all dangers; a refuge under all storms; *a dwelling-place in all generations*.



In the *third* and last place, Heaven and immortality pass not away. The fleeting scenes of this life are to be considered as no more than an introduction to a nobler and more permanent order of things, when man shall have attained the maturity of his being. This is what reason gave some ground to expect; what revelation has fully confirmed; and, in confirming it, has agreed with the sentiments and anticipations of the good and wise in every age. We are taught to believe, that what we now behold, is only the first stage of the life of man. We are arrived no farther than the threshold; we dwell as in the outer courts of existence.



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Here, tents only are pitched; tabernacles erected for the sojourners of a day. But in the region of eternity, all is great, stable, and unchanging. There, the *mansions* of the just are prepared: there, the *city which hath foundations* is built; there is established, the kingdom *which cannot be moved.* Here every thing is in stir and fluctuation; because here good men continue not, but pass onward in the course of being. There, all is serene, steady, and orderly; because there remaineth the final *rest of the people of God.* Here, all is corrupted by our folly and guilt; and of course must be transient and vain. But there, purchased by the death, and secured by the resurrection, of the Son of God, is an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* There reigns that tranquillity which is never troubled. There shines that sun which never sets. There flows that river of pleasures, which is always unruffled and pure. Looking forward to those divine habitations, the changes of the present world disappear to the eye of faith; and a good man becomes ashamed of suffering himself to be dejected by what is so soon to pass away.

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Such are the objects you ought to oppose to the transient *fashion of the world*; Virtue, and God, and Heaven. Fixing your regard on these, you will have no reason to complain of the lot of man, or the world's mutability.—The design of the preceding representation which I gave of the world, was not to indulge vain declamation; to raise fruitless melancholy; or to throw an unnecessary cloud over human life: But to shew the moderation requisite in our attachment to the world; and at the same time, to point out the higher objects both of attention and consolation which religion affords.——Passing and changeable as all human things are, among them, however, we must at present act our part; to them we must return from religious meditation. They are not below the regard of any Christian; for they form the scene which Providence has appointed at present for his activity, and his duty. Trials and dangers they may often present to him; but amidst these he will safely hold his course, if, when engaged in worldly affairs, he keep in view those divine objects which I have been setting before him. Let him ever retain con-



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nexion with Virtue, and God, and Heaven. By them let his conduct be regulated, and his constancy supported. So shall he *use this world* without *abusing it*. He shall neither droop under its misfortunes, nor be vainly elated by its advantages; but through all its changes shall carry an equal and steady mind; and in the end shall receive the accomplishment of the promise of Scripture, that though *the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, he that doeth the will of God shall abide for ever* *.

* 1 John, ii. 17.

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# SERMON XIII.

## On TRANQUILLITY of MIND.

PSALM XV. 5.

*—He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*



TRANQUILLITY of mind, or, in the words of the text, a mind *not moved* or disquieted by the accidents of life, is undoubtedly one of the greatest blessings that we can possess on earth. It is here mentioned as the reward of the man, whose character had been described in this psalm, as leading a virtuous life, and discharging his duty towards God and his neighbour. It is indeed the ultimate aim, to which the wishes of the wise and reflecting have ever been directed,

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directed, that with a mind undisturbed by anxieties, cares, and fears, they might pass their days in a pleasing serenity. They justly concluded that, by enjoying themselves in peace, they would enjoy, to the greatest advantage, all the comforts of life that came within their reach.

This happy tranquillity, the multitude conceive to be most readily attainable by means of wealth, or, at least, of an easy fortune; which they imagine would set them above all the ordinary disturbances of life. That it has some effect for this purpose, cannot be denied. Poverty and straitened circumstances are often inconsistent with tranquillity. To be destitute of those conveniencies that suit our rank in the world; to be burdened with anxiety about making provision for every day which passes over our head; instead of bringing comfort to a family who look up to us for aid, to behold ourselves surrounded with their wants and complaints, are circumstances which cannot fail to give much uneasiness to every feeling mind. To take measures, therefore, for attaining a competent fortune, by laudable means, is

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is wise and proper. Entire negligence of our affairs, and indifference about our worldly circumstances, is, for the most part, the consequence of some vice, or some folly.—At the same time, I must observe, that the attainment of opulence is no certain method of attaining tranquillity. Embarrassments and vexations often attend it; and long experience has shewn, that tranquillity is far from being always found among the rich. Nay, the higher that men rise in the world, the greater degrees of power and distinction which they acquire, they are often the farther removed from internal peace. The world affords so many instances of miseries abounding in the higher ranks of life, that it were needless to enlarge on a topic so generally known and admitted.

Assuming it, therefore, for an undoubted truth, that the mere possession of the goods of fortune may be consistent with the want of inward tranquillity, we must look around for other more certain grounds of it. We must enquire whether any line of conduct can be pointed out, which, independent of external situation in the world, shall tend to

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to make us easy in mind; shall either bestow, or aid, that tranquillity which all men desire. The remaining part of this discourse shall be employed in suggesting, with great plainness of speech, such directions as appear to me most material on this important subject.

THE *first* direction which I have to suggest is, that we imitate the character of the man who is described in this Psalm as *walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth, as he thinketh in his heart*; that we study to preserve a clear conscience, and to lead a virtuous and honourable, at least an inoffensive and innocent life. Of such a man only it can be said, that, *doing these things, he shall never be moved.* So great is the power of conscience over every human being, that the remembrance of crimes never fails to overthrow tranquillity of mind. Be assured, that he who defrauds his neighbour, who has ensnared the innocent, has violated his trust, or betrayed his friend, shall never enjoy within himself undisturbed quiet. His evil deeds will at times recur to

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to his thoughts, like ghosts rising up in black array before him to haunt his couch. Even the sense of a foolish and trifling conduct; of a life passed in idleness and dissipation; by which, though a man has not been guilty of great crimes, he has, however, wasted his substance, mispent his time, and brought upon himself just reproach; even this, I say, is sufficient to create much uneasiness and disquiet to the heart. Let him, therefore, who wishes to enjoy tranquillity, study, above all things, to act an irreproachable part. With comfort he will rest his head on his pillow at night, when he is conscious that throughout the day he has been doing his duty towards God and man; when none of the transactions of that day come back, in painful remembrance, to upbraid him. To this testimony of a good conscience, let him be able,

In the *second* place, to join humble trust in the favour of God. As, after the best endeavours we can use, no man's behaviour will be entirely faultless, it is essential to peace of mind, that we have some ground for hope in the divine mercy, that

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that, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our defects shall be forgiven, and grace be shewn us by Heaven. This includes all the duties of faith and repentance that are required by the gospel; the faithful discharge of which duties is absolutely necessary for delivering us from those fears of another world, which, if not allayed, are sufficient to banish all tranquillity from the heart. Our religious principles must at the same time be sound and pure; and carefully preserved from the taint of superstition, whose gloomy horrours, taking possession of weak and ill-informed minds, convert what they mistake for religion, into a source of misery.—Moreover, it is necessary, that we be able to place trust in God, not only as our future judge, but as the present Governour of human affairs. So uncertain is the continuance of every earthly comfort, that he who reposes no confidence in the Supreme Disposer of events, must be often disquieted and dejected. He alone possesses firm tranquillity, who, amidst all human vicissitudes, looks up, with settled trust, to an Almighty Ruler, as to one under whose conduct he

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is safe. To him alone belongs that happy privilege, described by the Psalmist: *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord* *. SERMON XIII.

I have pointed out the primary and essential foundations of tranquillity; virtuous conduct, good principles, and pious dispositions. At the same time, a man may be both pious and virtuous, and yet through some defects in the management of his mind and temper, may not possess that happy serenity and self-enjoyment, which ought to be the portion of virtue and piety. Instances of this will occur to every one who is acquainted with the world. We too often behold persons, whose principles, and whose moral conduct, are in the main unexceptionable, leading an uncomfortable life; through fretfulness of temper, peevishness of manners, or sullenness of disposition. There is, therefore, some discipline to be studied; there are some subsidiary parts of character to be attended to, in order to give piety and virtue their full effect for conferring tranquillity.

* Psalm cxii. 7.



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To the consideration of these secondary means I now proceed. Let me then advise you,

In the *third* place, to attend to the culture and improvement of your minds. A fund of useful knowledge, and a stock of ideas, afford much advantage for the enjoyment of tranquillity. I do not mean that every man must study to become deeply learned. The situation of many would not allow it. The taste, and the habits of others, prevent it. But what I mean is, that every man who wishes to lead a comfortable life should provide for himself, as much as he can, by means of observation, reading, and reflecting, a large field of useful thoughts. In a mind absolutely vacant, tranquillity is seldom found. The vacancy too often will be filled up by bad desires and passions. Whereas the mind of a wise man is a kingdom to itself. In his lonely, or melancholy hours, he finds always resources within himself, to which he can turn for relief. As there are many occasions when external objects afford no pleasure, it is only by

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by being able to rest on the entertainments afforded to himself by his mind, that any one can pass his days with self-enjoyment. Let me recommend for the same purpose, SERMON XIII.

In the *fourth* place, that we be always careful to provide proper employment for our time. Regular industry and labour, with intervals of ease, is perhaps the state most conducive of any to tranquillity. If our station give no call to industry, it will be profitable that we study to have some end or object in view, to which our attention shall be directed. Relaxation from intense or incessant pursuit, is requisite for comfort. But if relaxation degenerate into total idleness, it becomes in a high degree adverse to tranquillity. Every man by his nature is formed, more or less, for action. In a mind that is entirely quiescent, and that has no object to put it into motion, instead of self-enjoyment, there will be constant languor, tediousness, and misery. Life stagnates in such a situation, like a pool of dead waters; and the man becomes a burden to himself.



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self. Violent and dangerous pursuits, which distract and embroil those who are engaged in them, I cannot be understood to recommend. Every one sees how foreign these are to a state of tranquillity. But, in the ordinary tenour of calm and easy life, I would advise every one to have some end before him; some object which shall bring the mind into action, and fill up the vacuities of time. Provided the object be innocent and of no unsuitable or degrading nature, it may answer this purpose, though it should not be in itself of high importance. It is better for the mind to have some determinate direction given it, than to be always left floating, as it were, in empty space.—— But about whatever objects we are employed, it is still more material to tranquillity, that, in the

*Fifth* place, we learn to govern our passions. These are the most frequent disturbers of our peace. Necessary as their impulse is to give activity to the mind; yet if they are not kept in subordination to reason, they speedily throw all things into confusion. Such of them as belong



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to the malignant and unsocial class, evidently tend to produce vexation and disquiet. Against suffering these to gain possession of the heart, admonition is scarcely necessary. But I must admonish you, that even those which are accounted of innocent nature, and which therefore may lay hold of virtuous minds, if they obtain the entire mastery, are sufficient to overthrow the tranquillity of life. Let every one therefore, who values that tranquillity, study to retain moderation and self-command, even in the midst of passions which have a fair and bland appearance. He will find that the gratification of any one of them, compensates not that perpetual slavery to which it will reduce him, when it becomes inordinate.

I have farther to admonish you, that this self-command is particularly necessary in all that relates to habitual temper. Even where strong passions are out of the question, those slight emotions which ruffle or sour the temper, are sufficient, by their frequent recurrence, to poison all self enjoyment. He, who would possess a tranquil state, must, above all things, cul-



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tivate calmness and gentleness of disposition. He ought especially to cultivate it in that society, whether domestic or social, with which he has most frequent intercourse. We all know, that there are thousands, who in public, and in formal companies, appear to be all gentleness and sweetness, but who, at home, and among their nearest relations, give vent, with freedom, to the most harsh and peevish dispositions. Such persons are not likely to enjoy much real comfort. For it is in the daily and familiar intercourse of life, that temper chiefly exerts its power, either for promoting or for disturbing the tranquillity of our days. On occasions when men come closest together, if, instead of meeting in smooth contact, they rub and grate on one another, the feelings produced on both sides are of the most offensive and displeasing kind. Nothing can be assumed as a more certain axiom, than that he who allows either inordinate passions, or a cross temper, to govern him, must, though he should possess all that flourishing fortune can bestow, be a stranger to tranquillity.

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In the *sixth* place, let me advise you never to expect too much from the world. High hopes, and florid views, are great enemies to tranquillity. When rashly indulged, they are constantly producing disappointments. Their indulgence, in the mean time, occasions discontent with our present situation; and he who is discontented cannot be happy. One of the first lessons, both of religion and wisdom, is, to moderate our expectations and hopes; and not to set forth on the voyage of life like men who expect to be always carried forward with a favourable gale. Let your views be suited to your rank and station in the world; and never soar fantastically beyond them. Content yourselves with sober pleasures, and form your relish to them. Be thankful when you are free from pain, though you be not in the midst of high enjoyment. Be satisfied, if the path you tread be easy and smooth, though it be not strewed with flowers. Human life admits not of continued pleasure; nor is it always rendered happy by great exaltation. Remember, that it is a middle region which is the native



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station of tranquillity. It neither aspires to those heights of the atmosphere where the thunder is formed, nor creeps always on the ground. Affect not, on every occasion, to put yourselves forward. Be content to retire sometimes into the shade; and allow others to take their proper place.—It will be easily seen, that I speak not now to the ambitious and aspiring; but to those who value tranquillity more than splendid appearance in the world.

Such persons I also advise, while they expect not too much from the world, neither, also, to form too high expectations from the characters of those on whose friendship they rest, and with whom it is their lot to be connected, either in social or domestic relations. If you have looked for perfection any where, you will find yourself disappointed; and the consequence of this disappointment will be, that friendship will cool, and disgust succeed. If you wish to enjoy comfort in any of your connexions, take your fellow-creatures as they are, and look for their imperfections to appear.

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You know you have your own; bear with those of others, as you expect that they are to bear with you. As no one is without his failings, few also are void of amiable qualities. Select for your companions, those who have the greatest share of such qualities; and value them accordingly.—In a word, make the best of this world as you find it. Reckon both on the state of human life, and on the society of men, as mixed, and chequered with good and evil. Carrying always in your eye such views of things, you will be best formed to those equal spirits, and that reasonable disposition of mind, which make the basis of tranquillity. I shall only add, as my

*Seventh*, and last, advice on this subject, to mix retreat with the active business of the world, and to cultivate habits of serious thought and recollection. I before advised those who are not particularly engaged in active life, to form to themselves some object of pursuit, in order to furnish proper employment to time and thought. But the great multitude of men



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are in a different situation. Industry is required of them; business and cares press; and active pursuits occupy their closest attention. He who, in this situation, pours himself forth incessantly on the world, cannot escape partaking much of its disturbance and trouble. Amidst bustle, intrigue, and dissension, he must pass many an uneasy hour. Here an enemy encounters him; there, a rival meets him. A suspicious friend alarms him one hour; an ungrateful one provokes him the next. I do not recommend, that, for these reasons, he who studies tranquillity should retire from all public business, and forsake the haunts of men. This were the retreat of a monk, not of a good and a wise man. Tranquillity were too dearly purchased by the neglect of those duties which belong to a man, and a Christian. Nor indeed in absolute seclusion from the world, is tranquillity ever found. On the contrary, when the human mind is cut off from those employments for which it was designed by nature and Providence, it preys on itself, and engenders its own misery. Tranquillity is always most likely to be attained, when the business of the world

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world is tempered with thoughtful and serious retreat. *Commune with your hearts on your bed, and be still.* Leaving this world to itself, let there be seasons which you devote to yourselves, and to God. Reflection and meditation allay the workings of many unquiet passions; and place us at a distance from the tumults of the world. When the mind has either been ruffled or cast down, an intercourse with God and heaven we find a sanctuary to which we can retreat. In the hours of contemplation and devotion, a good man enjoys himself in peace. He beholds nobler objects than what worldly men can behold. He assumes a higher character. He listens to the voice of nature and of God; and from this holy sanctuary comes forth with a mind fortified against the little disturbances of the world. Such habits therefore, cannot be too much recommended to the lovers of tranquillity, as powerful subsidiary means for attaining that happy state.

I HAVE thus pointed out what appears to me the discipline of religion and wisdom for tranquillity of mind. *He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*—During the

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the early periods of life, vivid sensations of pleasure are the sole objects thought worthy of pursuit. Mere ease and calmness are despised, as the portion of the aged only and the feeble. Some longer acquaintance with the world, with its disappointed hopes and fallacious pleasures, teaches almost all men, by degrees, to wish for tranquillity and peace. But you must not imagine, that these are blessings which will drop on men of their own accord as soon as they begin to desire them. No: the thoughtless and the profligate, will ever remain strangers to them. They will remain the sport of every accident that occurs to derange their minds, and to disturb their life.—The three great enemies to tranquillity are, Vice, Superstition, and Idleness: Vice, which poisons and disturbs the mind with bad passions; Superstition, which fills it with imaginary terrours; Idleness, which loads it with tediousness and disgust. It is only by following the path which eternal wisdom has pointed out, that we can arrive at the blessed temple of tranquillity, and obtain a station there: By doing, or at least endeavouring to do, our duty to God and man; by

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by acquiring a humble trust in the mercy and favour of God through Jesus Christ; by cultivating our minds, and properly employing our time and thoughts; by governing our passions and our temper; by correcting all unreasonable expectations from the world and from men; and, in the midst of worldly business, habituating ourselves to calm retreat and serious recollection.—By such means as these, it may be hoped, that, through the divine blessing, our days shall flow in a stream as unruffled as the human state admits. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. But the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever* *.

* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

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# SERMON XIV.

## On the MISFORTUNES of MEN being chargeable on themselves.

PROVERBS, XIX. 3.

*The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

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HOW many complaints do we hear from every quarter, of the misery and distress that fill the world? In these the high and the low, the young and the aged, join; and since the beginning of time, no topic has been more fertile of declamation than the vanity and vexation which man is appointed to suffer. But are we certain that this vexation, and this vanity, is altogether to be ascribed to the



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appointment of Heaven? Is there no ground to suspect that man himself is the chief and immediate author of his own sufferings? What the text plainly suggests is, that it is common for men to complain groundlessly of Providence; that they are prone to accuse God for the evils of life, when in reason they ought to accuse themselves; and that after their *foolishness* hath *perverted their way*, and made them undergo the consequences of their own misconduct, they impiously *fret in heart against the Lord*. This is the doctrine which I now propose to illustrate, in order to silence the sceptic, and to check a repining and irreligious spirit. I shall for this end make some observations, first, on the external, and next, upon the internal, condition of man, and then conclude with such serious and useful improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. Let us consider the external condition of man. We find him placed in a world, where he has by no means the disposal of the events that happen. Calamities sometimes befal the worthiest and the best,

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best, which it is not in their power to prevent, and where nothing is left them, but to acknowledge and to submit to the high hand of Heaven. For such visitations of trial, many good and wise reasons can be assigned, which the present subject leads me not to discuss. But though those unavoidable calamities make a part, yet they make not the chief part, of the vexations and sorrows that distress human life. A multitude of evils beset us, for the source of which we must look to another quarter.—No sooner has any thing in the health, or in the circumstances of men, gone cross to their wish, than they begin to talk of the unequal distribution of the good things of this life; they envy the condition of others; they repine at their own lot, and fret against the Ruler of the world.

Full of these sentiments, one man pines under a broken constitution. But let us ask him, whether we can, fairly and honestly, assign no cause for this but the unknown decree of Heaven. Has he duly valued the blessing of health, and always observed the rules of virtue and sobriety?

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briety? Has he been moderate in his life, and temperate in all his pleasures? If now he be only paying the price of his former, perhaps his forgotten indulgences, has he any title to complain, as if he were suffering unjustly? Were you to survey the chambers of sickness and distress, you would find them peopled with the victims of intemperance and sensuality, and with the children of vicious indolence and sloth. Among the thousands who languish there, you would find the proportion of innocent sufferers to be small. You would see faded youth, premature old age, and the prospect of an untimely grave, to be the portion of multitudes who, in one way or other, have brought those evils on themselves; while yet these martyrs of vice and folly have the assurance to arraign the hard fate of man, and to *fret against the Lord.*



But you, perhaps, complain of hardships of another kind; of the injustice of the world; of the poverty which you suffer, and the discouragements under which you labour; of the crosses and disappointments of which your life has been doomed

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doomed to be full.——Before you give too much scope to your discontent, let me desire you to reflect impartially upon your past train of life. Have not sloth, or pride, or ill-temper, or sinful passions, misled you often from the path of sound and wise conduct? Have you not been wanting to yourselves in improving those opportunities which Providence offered you, for bettering and advancing your state? If you have chosen to indulge your humour or your taste, in the gratifications of indolence or pleasure, can you complain, because others, in preference to you, have obtained those advantages which naturally belong to useful labours, and honourable pursuits? Have not the consequences of some false steps, into which your passions or your pleasures have betrayed you, pursued you through much of your life; tainted, perhaps your character, involved you in embarrassments, or sunk you into neglect?——It is an old saying, that every man is the artificer of his own fortune in the world. It is certain that the world seldom turns wholly against a man, unless through his own fault.

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fault. *Godliness is*, in general, *profitable unto all things*. Virtue, diligence, and industry, joined with good temper and prudence, have ever been found the surest road to prosperity; and where men fail of attaining it, their want of success is far oftener owing to their having deviated from that road, than to their having encountered insuperable bars in it. Some, by being too artful, forfeit the reputation of probity. Some, by being too open, are accounted to fail in prudence. Others by being fickle and changeable, are distrusted by all.——The case commonly is, that men seek to ascribe their disappointments to any cause, rather than to their own misconduct; and when they can devise no other cause, they lay them to the charge of Providence. Their folly leads them into vices; their vices into misfortunes; and in their misfortunes they *fret against the Lord*. They are doubly unjust towards God. In their prosperity, they are apt to ascribe their success to their own diligence, rather than to God's blessing; and in their adversity, they impute their distresses to his providence,

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not to their own misbehaviour. Whereas, the truth is the very reverse of this. *Every good and every perfect gift cometh from above*; and of evil and misery, man is the author to himself.

When from the condition of individuals, we look abroad to the public state of the world, we meet with more proofs of the truth of this assertion. We see great societies of men torn in pieces by intestine dissensions, tumults, and civil commotions. We see mighty armies going forth, in formidable array, against each other, to cover the earth with blood, and to fill the air with the cries of widows and orphans. Sad evils these are, to which this miserable world is exposed. ——But are these evils, I beseech you, to be imputed to God? Was it he who sent forth slaughtering armies into the field, or who filled the peaceful city with massacres and blood? Are these miseries any other than the bitter fruit of men's violent and disorderly passions? Are they not clearly to be traced to the ambition and vices of princes, to the quarrels of the great, and to the turbulence of the people?

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people?——Let us lay them entirely out of the account, in thinking of Providence; and let us think only of the *foolishness of men.* Did man control his passions, and form his conduct according to the dictates of wisdom, humanity, and virtue, the earth would no longer be desolated by cruelty; and human societies would live in order, harmony, and peace. In those scenes of mischief and violence which fill the world, let man behold, with shame, the pictures of his vices, his ignorance and folly. Let him be humbled by the mortifying view of his own *perverseness*; but let not *his heart fret against the Lord.*——From the external condition, let us proceed,

II. To consider the internal state of man. It is certain that much disquiet and misery may be found there, although his outward condition appear undisturbed and easy. As far as this inward disquietude arises from the stings of conscience, and the horrors of guilt, there can be no doubt of its being self-created misery; which it is altogether impossible to impute to Heaven.



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But even, when great crimes and deep remorse, are not the occasions of torment, how often is poison infused into the most flourishing conditions of fortune, by the follies and the passions of the prosperous? We see them peevish and restless; corrupted with luxury, and enervated by ease; impatient of the smallest disappointment; oppressed with low spirits, and complaining of every thing around them. How many *Hamans*, *Hazaels*, and *Herods*, are there in the world, who, from what they suffer within, pass their days in more vexation and misery, than they who undergo the hardships of poverty? Dare such men in their most discontented moments, charge the providence of Heaven with miseries of their own procuring? Providence had put into their hands the fairest opportunity of passing their life with comfort. But they themselves blasted every comfort that was offered; and verified the prediction, that *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them* *.

As it is man's own *foolishness* which ruins his prosperity, we must not omit to

* Prov. i. 32.

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remark, that it is the same cause which aggravates and embitters his adversity. That you suffer from the external afflictions of the world, may often be owing to God's appointment; but when, in the midst of these, you also suffer from the disorders of your mind and passions, this is owing to yourselves; and there are those inward disorders which add the severest sting to external afflictions. Many are the resources of a good and a wise man, under all the disasters of life. In the midst of them, it is always in his power to enjoy peace of mind, and hope in God. He may suffer; but under suffering he will not sink, as long as all is sound within. But when the spirit has been wounded by guilt and folly, its wounds open, and bleed afresh, upon every blow that is received from the world. The mind becomes sensible and sore to the slightest injuries of fortune; and a small reverse is felt as an insupportable calamity.

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On the whole, the farther you search into human life, and the more you observe the manners and the conduct of men, you will be the more convinced of this great



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truth, that of the distresses which abound in the world, we are the chief authors. Among the multitudes who are, at this day, bewailing their condition and lot, it will be found to hold, of far the greater part, that they are reaping the *fruit of their own doings; their iniquities are reproving them, and their backslidings correcting them.* Unattainable objects foolishly pursued, intemperate passions nourished, vicious pleasures and desires indulged, God, and God's holy laws forgotten; these, these are the great scourges of the world; the great causes of the life of man being so embroiled and unhappy. God hath ordained our state on earth to be a mixed and imperfect state. We have ourselves to blame for its becoming an insupportable one. If it bring forth nothing to us but vexation and vanity, we have sown the seeds of that vanity and vexation; and as we have sown, we must reap.—I now proceed to make improvement of those truths which we have been considering.

In the *first* place, let us be taught to look upon sin as the source of all our miseries,



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series. It may sometimes assume the gentler names of folly, irregularity, or levity; but under whatever form it appears, it always imports a deviation from that sacred law which ought to regulate our conduct. It is still *the root that beareth gall and wormwood* *; and in exact proportion to the quantity of this poisonous weed, which we ourselves have infused into our cup, we must expect to drink the waters of bitterness. If the *foolishness of man* did not *pervert his ways*, his heart would have no occasion to *fret against the Lord*. He would enjoy competent satisfaction in every situation of life; and, under its unavoidable evils, would derive consolation from religion and virtue.—— Indeed, of every evil which we now endure, of those evils which we look upon to be the appointment of Providence, as well as of others, sin is ultimately the cause; as it was man's revolt from God, which gave rise originally to those evils, and which rendered the chastisements we undergo, in this state of discipline, neces-

* Deut. xxix. 18.



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sary, even for the *sons of God*.——But at present, we confine our observation to those miseries of which men are the immediate procurers to themselves; and from them alone, we find sufficient reason to consider sin as the capital foe to man; as the great troubler and disturber of his life. To Providence, then, let us look up with reverence. On sin let our indignation be vented; and, what is of more consequence, against sin and all its approaches, let our utmost caution be employed. As we proceed through the different paths of life, let us accustom ourselves to beware of sin, as the hidden snake lurking among the grass, from whose fatal touch we must fly in haste, if we would not experience its sting.—— Too many have no just apprehensions of this danger. *Fools*, said the wise man, *make a mock at sin*. A fool indeed he must be, who dares to think lightly of it. He shews not only the depravity of his heart, but, what perhaps he will be more ashamed to be charged with, he shews his ignorance of the world. He shews that he knows not, he understands not, even his worldly

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worldly interest, nor the interest and happiness of human society. SERMON XIV.

In the *second* place, let us learn, from what has been set forth, one of the most awful and important of all truths, the reality of a Divine government exercised over the world. Blind must that man be who discerns not the most striking marks of it, in the doctrine which has been under our review. If there be a sceptic, who contends, that unrestrained liberty in the gratification of desire is given to man; that, in the sight of his Creator, all actions are equal; and that no rule of moral conduct hath been prescribed, or by any penalty enforced; in order to confute such a man, we have not recourse to reasonings, but simply appeal to plain and obvious facts. We bid him look only to the life of man; and take notice how every vice is, by the constitution of things, connected with misery. We bid him trace the history of any one, with whose conduct he had particular occasion to be acquainted; and observe, whether the chief misfortunes which pursued him were not brought

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brought upon him by his own misbehaviour. We bid him remark in the history of nations, whether public virtue has not always exalted them; and whether licentiousness and crimes have not paved the way for their ruin. These are testimonies to the truth of religion, which cannot by any sophistry be evaded. This is a voice, which speaks its warnings loud and strong to every heart.

The system upon which the Divine government at present proceeds, plainly is, that men's *own wickedness* should be appointed to *correct them*; that sinners should *be snared in the work of their hands, and sunk in the pit which themselves had digged*; *that the backslider in heart should be filled with his own ways.*——Of all the plans which could have been devised for the government of the world, this approves itself to reason, as the wisest and most worthy of God; so to frame the constitution of things, that the Divine laws should in a manner execute themselves, and carry their sanctions in their own bosom. When the vices of men require punishment to be inflicted, the Almighty is

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at no loss for ministers of justice. A thousand instruments of vengeance are at his command; innumerable arrows are always in his quiver. But such is the profound wisdom of his plan, that no peculiar interposals of power are requisite. He has no occasion to step from his throne, and to interrupt the order of nature. With that majesty and solemnity which befits Omnipotence, He pronounces, *Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone* *. He leaves trangressors to their own guilt, and punishment follows of course. Their sins do the work of justice. They lift the scourge; and with every stroke which they inflict on the criminal, they mix this severe admonition, that as he is only reaping the fruit of his own actions, he deserves all that he suffers.—— From what has been said, I might take occasion,



In the *third* place, to shew the injustice of our charging Providence with a promiscuous and unequal distribution of its favours among the good and the bad.

* Hosea, iv. 17.

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That unequal distribution takes place in appearance only, not in reality. The whole conduct of Providence sufficiently marks, which of those classes of men it blesses and protects. The prosperity of sinners is no more than a deceitful show. The great materials of happiness are provided for the virtuous; and *evil* never fails to *pursue the wicked.* I shall close the discourse with observing,

In the *fourth* and last place, the necessity which plainly arises from our present condition, of looking up to God for direction and aid in the conduct of life. The result of the whole doctrine I have now delivered is, that man's happiness or misery is, in a great measure, put into his own hands. In vain he complains of Providence. If his *heart fret against the Lord*, it is only because *his foolishness hath perverted his way:* for on himself, and his own behaviour, it depends, to be free of those miseries which harass the wicked. — But, alas! when we say, that this depends upon man, on what uncertain ground do we place his security? Is man, when left to himself

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himself equal to this high trust that is reposed in him, this important charge that is committed to him, of attaining happiness, by wise and irreproachable conduct? Inconstant as he is in virtue, variable in his resolutions, soft and yielding in his nature to a thousand temptations; how shall he guide himself through such slippery and dangerous paths as those of human life; where many hidden precipices surround him; many false lights lead him astray; and where the consequence of every step he takes may be destruction and ruin? — Thankful let us be to Heaven, that, in this situation, a merciful guide stretches out his hand to aid us; that a celestial light shines upon us from above; that a divine Spirit is promised to illuminate and strengthen us. Let us humbly request of Heaven, that this Spirit of the Almighty may ever be our guide; never presumptuously trusting in our own wisdom, but listening attentively to the voice of God; and *in all our ways acknowledging Him* who only can *direct our steps*.—Upon the whole let us hold fast the persuasion of these fundamental truths; — that, in all his dispensations,



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pensations, God is just and good; that the cause of all the troubles we suffer is in ourselves, not in Him; that virtue is the surest guide to a happy life; that he who forsakes this guide, enters upon the path of death; but that he who *walketh uprightly*, *walketh surely*; and that he who *keepeth the commandment*, *keepeth his own soul*.

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# SERMON XV.

## On INTEGRITY as the GUIDE of LIFE.

PROVERBS, xi. 3.

*The integrity of the upright shall guide them.—*



RIGHTEOUSNESS and sin are, in this book of Proverbs, frequently contrasted with each other, and the advantages of the former displayed. The righteous man is shewn to be *more excellent than his neighbour*, as *the ways in which he walks are ways of pleasantness*, while *the way of trangressors is hard.* Honour is represented as attending the one, while shame is the portion of the other. The path of the one leads to life; that of the other

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other to destruction. In the text, an advantage of righteousness is specified, which is not commonly attended to, and which some will not readily allow that it possesses. We are told by the wise man, that it affords light and direction to conduct, and will prove our best guide through all the intricacies of life. *The integrity of the upright shall guide them*; or, as it is added, to the same purpose, in a following verse, *the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way*. There are many who will admit, that integrity is an amiable quality; that it is entitled to much respect, and in most cases ought to influence our behaviour; who nevertheless are unwilling to allow it the chief place in the direction of their worldly conduct. They hold, that a certain artful sagacity, founded upon knowledge of the world, is the best conductor of every one who would be a successful adventurer in life; and that a strict attention to integrity, as his only guide, would often lead him into danger and distress. In opposition to tenets of this kind, I now purpose to show that, amidst all perplexities and dangers, there is no



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guide we can choose so safe, and so successful on the whole, as the integrity of an upright mind; and that, upon every trying occasion, principles of probity and honour will conduct a good man through life with more advantage, than if he were to act upon the most refined system of worldly wisdom. SERMON XV.

It will not take much time to delineate the character of the man of integrity, as by its nature it is a plain one, and easily understood. He is one who makes it his constant rule to follow the road of duty according as the word of God, and the voice of his conscience, point it out to him.

He is not guided merely by affections, which may sometimes give the colour of virtue to a loose and unstable character. The upright man is guided by a fixed principle of mind, which determines him to esteem nothing but what is honourable, and to abhor whatever is base and unworthy in moral conduct. Hence you find him ever the same; at all times, the trusty friend, the affectionate relation, the conscientious man of business, the pious



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worshipper, the public-spirited citizen. He assumes no borrowed appearance. He seeks no mask to cover him; for he acts no studied part; but he is in truth what he appears to be, full of truth, candour, and humanity. In all his pursuits, he knows no path but the fair and direct one; and would much rather fail of success, than attain it by reproachful means. He never shews you a smiling countenance, while he meditates evil against you in his heart. He never praises you among your friends; and then joins in traducing you among your enemies. You will never find one part of his character at variance with another. In his manners, he is simple and unaffected; in all his proceedings, open and consistent.—Such is the man of integrity spoken of in the text. Let us now proceed to show, in what manner, and with what effect, integrity serves for the guide of his life.

EVERY one who has begun to make any progress in the world, will be sensible, that to conduct himself in human affairs with wisdom and propriety, is often a matter

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ter of no small difficulty. Amidst that va- SERMON XV.
riety of characters, of jarring dispositions, and of interfering interests, which take place among those with whom we have intercourse, we are frequently at a stand as to the part most prudent for us to choose. Ignorant of what is passing in the breasts of those around us, we can form no more than doubtful conjectures concerning the events that are likely to happen. They may take some turn altogether different from the course in which we have imagined they were to run, and according to which we had formed our plans. The slightest incident often shoots out into important consequences, of which we were not aware. The labyrinth becomes so intricate, that the most sagacious can lay hold on no clue to guide him through it: He finds himself embarrassed, and at a loss how to act.—In public and in private life, in managing our own concerns, and in directing those of others, the doubt started by the wise man frequently occurs; *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* While thus fatigued with conjecture, we remain perplexed and undetermined in our choice;



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we are at the same time pulled to different sides, by the various emotions which belong to our nature. On one hand, pleasure allures us to what is agreeable; on the other, interest weighs us down towards what seems gainful. Honour attracts us towards what is splendid; and indolence inclines us to what is easy. In the consultations which we hold with our own mind, concerning our conduct, how often are we thus divided within ourselves; puzzled by the uncertainty of future events, and distracted by the contest of different inclinations?

It is in such situations as these, that the principle of integrity interposes to give light and direction. While worldly men fluctuate in the midst of those perplexities which I have described, the virtuous man has one Oracle, to which he resorts in every dubious case, and whose decisions he holds to be infallible. He consults his conscience. He listens to the voice of God. Were it only on a few occasions that this Oracle could be consulted, its value would be less. But it is a mistake to imagine, that its Responses are seldom



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given. Hardly is there any material transaction whatever in human life, any important question that holds us in suspense as to practice, but the difference between right and wrong will show itself; and the principle of integrity will, if we listen to it impartially, give a clear decision. Whenever the mind is divided within itself, conscience is seldom or never neutral. There is always one side or other to which it leans. There is always one scale of the balance, into which it throws the weight of *some virtue, or some praise*; of something that is *just and true, lovely, honest, and of good report.* These are the forms, which rise to the observation of the upright man. By others they may be unseen, or overlooked; but, in his eye, the lustre of virtue out-shines all other brightness. Wherever this pole-star directs him, he steadily holds his course.——Let the issue of that course be ever so uncertain; let his friends differ from him in opinion; let his enemies clamour; he is not moved; his purpose is fixed. He asks but one question of his heart, What is the most worthy and honourable part? What is the part most be-



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coming the station which he possesses, the character which he wishes to bear, the expectations which good men entertain of him? Being once decided as to this, he hesitates no more. He shuts his ears against every solicitation. He pursues the direct line of integrity, without *turning either to the right hand or to the left.* "It "is the Lord who calleth. Him I follow. "Let him order what seemeth good in his "sight."——It is in this manner that the *integrity of the upright* acts as *their guide.*

BUT as, upon a superficial view, it may appear hazardous to place ourselves entirely under such a guide, let us now proceed to consider what can be said in defence of this plan of conduct, and what advantages serve to recommend it.

In the *first* place, I affirm, that the guidance of integrity is the safest under which we can be placed; that the road in which it leads us is, upon the whole, the freest from dangers. Perfect immunity from danger is not to be expected in this life.

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We can choose no path, in which we may not meet with disappointments and misfortunes. Our life, at the best, is a pilgrimage, and perils surround it. Against these perils, the men of the world imagine that craft and dexterity furnish the best defence; and if, in any instance, they over-reach the upright, they consider it as a manifest decision in favour of their plan. But, instead of resting on a few instances, let us take an extensive survey of the course of human affairs. Let us inquire who the persons are that, in all the different lines of life, have gone through the world with most success; and we shall find, that the men of probity and honour form by far the most considerable part of the list; we shall find that men of plain understanding, acting upon fair and direct views, have much oftener prospered, than men of the deepest policy, who were devoid of principle. How few are the instances of persons who, by fidelity, worth, and stedfast adherence to their duty, have either lost their fortunes, or incurred general displeasure, in times when human affairs were proceeding in their



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ordinary train? But how numerous and frequent are the examples of those whose prospects have been blasted, whose circumstances have been ruined, and their names sunk into contempt, by vice and dishonesty?

The man of the world aims at higher things, and more rapid success, than the man of moderation and virtue. But, at the same time, he incurs greater risks and dangers. No calculation of probabilities can insure safety to him who is acting a deceitful part. Amidst the unforeseen vicissitudes of the world, he has to dread not only disappointment to his plans, but the miseries also which detected fallacies may bring on his head. He walks on the edge of precipices, where a single false step may be fatal. He follows a wandering light, which, if it fail of guiding him by a short path to the palace of ambition, lands him in the pit, or the lake. Whereas he who follows the guidance of integrity, walks in the high road on which the light of the sun shines. He sees before him the habitation of peace to which his steps are directed; and if he be longer in arriving

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arriving at it, he is sure of neither wandering far astray, nor of meeting on his road with any forms of unusual terrour. —— Let it be always remembered, that the principle of integrity which directs a good man, is far from excluding prudence in the conduct of life. It implies no improvident or thoughtless simplicity. On the contrary, it is closely connected with true wisdom. A man of enlarged capacity, and extensive views, is always upright. Craft is merely the supplement of inferiour abilities. It characterizes a narrow comprehension, and a little mind. — As the path of integrity is on the whole the safest path of conduct; so, SERMON XV.

In the *second* place, it is unquestionably the most honourable. Integrity is the foundation of all that is high in character among mankind. Other qualities may add to its spendour; but, if this essential requisite be wanting, all their lustre fades. Were I drawing the character of one who claimed the admiration of the world; and after I had ascribed to him eloquence, valour, and every endowment that is most shining

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shining and captivating, did I add, that he was a man of too much art to be trusted, I appeal to every one, whether, by this single stroke, the whole character would not be sunk and degraded? An interested and crafty man may perhaps rise into influence and high station; he may be a rich and a powerful, but will never be a great man. He may be feared, and externally honoured and courted; but in the secret thoughts of men he finds no respect. We all feel, that magnanimous sentiments cannot dwell in the same breast with selfishness and deceit.

He who rests upon an internal principle of virtue and honour, will act with a dignity and a boldness, of which they are incapable who are wholly guided by interest. He is above those timid suspicions, and cautious restraints, which fetter and embarrass their conduct. That firmness which the consciousness of rectitude inspires, gives vigour and force to his exertions on every great occasion. It adds double weight to all the abilities of which he is possessed. It even supplies the place of those abilities in which he is defective. They who oppose him are obliged to honour

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honour him. They look up to him with a secret awe, as to one who moves above them in a superiour sphere; regardless of their good or ill opinion, of their promises or their threatenings: like one of those celestial luminaries which holds its course through its orbit, without being affected by any commotions among the elements below. Such a man is trusted, and relied upon, as well as esteemed, because all know where to find him, and upon what system he acts. He attaches friends and followers to himself, without courting them; and though his progress towards fame should be slow and interrupted at first by crooked arts, it is nevertheless certain and sure. The public may be misled for a while, in judging of real merit; but it is seldom unjust at the last. As persons continue to come forward to view, and to act their part in trying circumstances, their characters are at length fully ascertained; and, almost always, rated as they deserve. How corrupt soever the world may be, they cannot withhold approbation from him whose conduct is marked by uniform integrity and honour.

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Enemies he will have, but the public favours him; the multitude of men wish him success; and destine him, in their thoughts, to every step of his preferment, before he arrives at it.

In the *third* place, the plan of conduct on which the man of integrity proceeds, is the most comfortable; that is, attended with the greatest satisfaction in a man's own mind. Amidst the various and perplexing events of life, it is of singular advantage to be kept free from doubt, as to the part most proper to be chosen. He who consults nothing but worldly interest, must, upon every turn of fortune, undergo much painful suspense. He is obliged to listen with anxious ear to every whisper of report; and, upon every new aspect which the face of affairs assumes, must study how to place himself in a new posture of defence. But the man of principle is a stranger to these inward troubles. His time is not lost, nor his temper fretted, by long and anxious consultations. One light always shines upon him from above. One path, the path of integrity,

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grity, always opens clear and distinct to his view.—But this is not his only advantage, to be freed from embarrassments, by having placed himself under the charge of one constant guide. He is also rewarded with the sense of having chosen his guide well and wisely. He is delivered from all inward upbraidings, from all misgivings of mind, from all alarms founded on the dread of discovery and disgrace. A good conscience enables him to look back on the part which he has acted, with satisfaction; and to look forward to the issue which it may bring, without concern. It is in the case of one issue only, that the man who acts from worldly interest can enjoy satisfaction; that is, when his designs have succeeded according to his wish. But it is the felicity of the man who acts under the direction of integrity, that, in every issue, he has something to comfort him. Though success has failed him, the consolation remains of having done his duty, and studied to approve himself to God.

This reference of all his actions to divine approbation, furnishes another source of

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of satisfaction and peace. He looks up, with pleasing hope, to a protector in the heavens, who *loveth righteousness, and whose countenance beholdeth the upright.* The man of worldly wisdom is conscious of having no title to the favour of that high administration which rules the universe. By quitting the path of righteousness, he has left that straight road, in which God had appointed him to walk. He has taken the direction of his way to himself, and chosen to be his own guide and master. To his own abilities, therefore, such as they are, he must trust; and is become wholly responsible for the issue of his conduct. But the man of virtue hath *committed his way to the Lord.* He follows the divine signal. He co-operates with the divine purpose. The power which sways the universe, is engaged on his side. By natural consequence, he has ground to expect that any seeming disappointments which he may now incur, shall be over-ruled at the end to some salutary effect. Hence that *peace of God keeping the heart,* to which worldly men are strangers. Hence a degree of firmness and resolution in conduct, which

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which it is impossible for them to possess. Especially when we add,



In the *fourth* and last place, that he who thus pursues a course of integrity, has always in his view the prospect of immortal rewards. That surely is the wisest direction of conduct, which is most amply recompensed at last. But what recompence can worldly wisdom bestow, comparable to what is promised by the gospel to them who, *by patient continuance in well-doing, look for glory, honour, and immortality.*—The recompence indeed is distant but the hope of it is present; and hope is one of the most powerful principles of human action. Let a man be firm in the belief that he is acting under the immediate protection of Heaven, and that through all eternity he shall be rewarded for what he now performs; and, as far as this belief is prevalent, his conduct will be steady and determined. Wherever religion directs him to hold his course, he will advance with intrepidity. He will submit to restraints without reluctance. He will meet dangers without fear. To every

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every motive which reason suggests in favour of virtue, the hope of life eternal adds supernatural strength.—Accordingly, in the behaviour of many holy men, under the most trying circumstances of distress, we behold this effect eminently exemplified. It appears, with much lustre, in the spirited and magnanimous sentiments of the Apostle Paul, when he had the prospect of death before him. *Behold I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befal me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy* *.—— *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day* †.

* Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24. † 2 Timothy, iv. 6, 7, 8.

Thus

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THUS I have endeavoured to shew in what manner the *integrity of the upright guides them*; and what the advantages are, of placing ourselves under its guidance. If it be the line of safety, or the line of honour, which we choose to pursue; if we consult our present comfort, or look forward to future rewards; in all these respects, the course which integrity points out is by far the most eligible.

It is a great recommendation of the guidance offered to us by integrity, that it is easily understood by all men. Plans of worldly policy are deep and intricate; and experience shows how often the ablest persons are mistaken in the measures which they adopt for carrying them on. But when men's intentions are fair and upright, it will be found, that a moderate share of understanding and attention is all that is requisite, for conducting themselves with safety and propriety. Providence never intended, that the art of living happily in this world should depend on that deep penetration, that acute sagacity, and those refinements of thought,



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which few possess. It has dealt more graciously with us; and made happiness to depend on uprightness of intention, much more than on extent of capacity. For the most part, the first sentiment which strikes a good man, concerning what he ought or ought not to do, is the soundest, and suggests the best and wisest counsel. When he hesitates, and begins to deliberate how far his duty, or his honour, can be reconciled to what seems his interest, he is on the point of deviating into a dangerous path.——At the same time, it is of great consequence, that he who seeks to surrender his conduct to the direction of integrity, should be well apprized of what true integrity requires. Let him guard against burdening conscience unnecessarily; lest a superstitious regard to trifles lead him to relax in matters of higher obligation. Let him avoid minute scrupulosity, on the one hand. Let him keep at a distance from loose casuistry, on the other. But when he is satisfied that his conscience has been well informed, let him, without wavering, adhere to its dictates in the whole of



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his conduct. This will prove the truest wisdom both for this world and the next. For *he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely. The path of the just is as the shining light:* And it shall *shine more and more unto the perfect day.*





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# SERMON XVI.

## On Submission to the Divine Will.

Job, ii. 10.

*—Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*

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FEW subjects of religious exhortation are more of general concern, than those which respect the distresses incident to human life. For no society, no family, no person, can expect to be long exempted from them; and when we speak of the prosperous, we can only mean those who are more rarely subject to them than others. Now, under those distresses, religion performs two offices: it teaches us how we ought to

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to bear them; and it assists us in thus bearing them. Materials for both are found in the words of the text, which contain a sentiment so natural and just, as to carry conviction to every reasonable mind. They were the words of Job, at a time when, to his other calamities, this domestick affliction was added, that one who ought to have assuaged and soothed his sorrows provoked his indignation by an impious speech. *Thou speakest*, Job replies, *as one of the foolish women speaketh: What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* Three instructions naturally arise from the text: First, that this life is a mixed state of good and evil: Secondly, That both the goods and the evils in it proceed from God: And, thirdly, That there are just reasons for our receiving with patience the evils of life, from the same hand which bestows its goods.

I. This life is a mixed state of good and evil. This is a matter of fact, which will be denied by none, and on which it is not necessary to bestow much illustration.



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tion. It is evident to the slightest inspection, that nothing here is unallayed and pure. Every man's state is chequered with alternate griefs and joys, disappointment and success. No condition is altogether stable. No life preserves always the same tenour. The vicissitudes of the world sometimes bring forward the afflicted into more comfortable circumstances; and often trouble the joy of the prosperous. This is the train in which human affairs have ever been found to proceed; and in which we may expect them always to go on.

But though this be universally admitted in speculation, and often confessed in discourse, the misfortune is, that few think of applying it to their own case. The bulk of mankind discover as much confidence in prosperity, and as much impatience under the least reverse, as if Providence had first given them assurance that their prosperity was never to change, and afterwards had cheated their hopes. Whereas, what reason ought to teach us, is to adjust our mind to the mixed state in which we find ourselves placed; never

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to presume, never to despair; to be thankful for the goods which at present we enjoy, and to expect the evils that may succeed.—Thou hast been admitted to partake of the feast of life. Its good things are distributed, in various portions, among the guests. Thou hast had thine allotted share. Complain not, when thy portion is removed. It is not permitted to any one, to remain always at the banquet.

II. We are taught by the text, that both the goods and the evils which compose this mixed state, come from the hand of God. A little reflection may convince us, that, in God's world, neither good nor evil can happen by chance. If there were any one moment, in which God quitted the reins of the universe, and suffered any power to interfere with his administration, it is evident, that, from that moment, the measures of his government must become disjointed and incomplete. He who governs all things, must govern continually; and govern the least things as well as the greatest. *He never slumbers, nor sleeps.* There are no void spaces, no



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broken plans, in his administration; no blessings that drop upon us without his intention; nor any crosses that visit us, unsent by him. *I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things* *.

How it has come to pass, that this life should contain such a mixture of goods and evils, and that the mixture too should be of God's appointment, gives rise to a difficult inquiry. For how can any thing but what is good, proceed from the God of love? Can darkness issue from the source of light? or can it be any satisfaction to the *Father of mercies*, to behold the sorrows of creatures whom he has made?—Here there was room for much perplexity, till revelation informed us, that the mixture of evils in man's estate is owing to man himself. Had he continued as God originally made him, he would have received nothing but good from his Creator. His apostacy and corruption opened the gates of the tabernacle of

* Isaiah, xlv. 6, 7.

darkness,

darkness. Misery issued forth, and has ever since pursued him. In the present condition of his nature, that misery is partly punishment, partly trial. He is become incapable of bearing uninterrupted prosperity; and, by the mixture of evils in his lot, merciful designs are carried on for his improvement and restoration. SERMON XVI.

What the text leads us at present to consider is, the effect that will follow from imitating the example of Job, and referring to the hand of the Almighty, the evils which we suffer, as well as the goods which we enjoy. Such a reference of the distressful events of our life to the appointment of Heaven, not only is a duty which piety requires, but tends also to mitigate distress, and to suggest consolation. For to dwell, as is too commonly done, upon the instruments and subordinate means of our trouble, is frequently the cause of much grief, and much sin. When we view our sufferings as proceeding merely from our fellow-creatures, the part which they have acted in bringing them upon us, is often more grating

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grating than the suffering itself. The unreasonableness, perhaps, of an enemy, the treachery of a friend, the ingratitude or insolence of one whom we had much obliged, add weight to a load laid upon us by means so provoking. The thoughts of their malignity, or of our own neglect in guarding against it, serve to poison the sore. Whereas, if, instead of looking to men, we behold the cross as coming from God, these aggravating circumstances would affect us less; we would feel no more than a proper burden; we would submit to it more patiently; and many resources would open to us, as shall in a little be shewn, from thinking of the hand that lays it on. Had Job, when despoiled of all his substance, thought of nothing but the Chaldeans and Sabeans who robbed him, with what violent passions would he have been transported, and with what eager desires of revenge tormented? Whereas, considering them as rods and instruments only in the divine hand, and receiving the correction as from the Almighty himself, the tumult of his mind subsided; and with respectful composure

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posure he could say, *The Lord gave; and the Lord hath taken away: Blessed be the name of the Lord!* This leads me, SERMON XV.

III. To consider the last, and most important instruction, arising from the text; namely, that there are many reasons why we, who receive good from the hand of God, should receive with patience the evils which he is pleased to inflict. This is strongly conveyed by that interrogatory form of speech, in which the sentiment of Job is expressed: *What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* In order to unfold all that is contained in this appeal made to every man's conscience, let us consider,

In the *first* place, that the good things which God has bestowed, afford sufficient evidence for our believing, that the evils which he sends, are not causelessly or wantonly inflicted. Did we live in a world which bore the marks of a malicious or cruel governor, there might be reason for distrusting every step of his conduct. But in the world which we inhabit, we behold,

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on the contrary, plain marks of predominant goodness. We behold the structure of the universe, the order of nature, the general course of Providence, obviously arranged with a benevolent regard to the welfare of men. All the art and contrivance of which the divine works are full, point to this end; and the more they are explored, create the firmer belief, that the goodness of the Deity gave rise to the system of creation. What is the conclusion to be thence drawn, but that, in such parts of the divine administration as appear to us harsh and severe, the same goodness continues to preside, though exercised in a hidden and mysterious manner.

Let me desire you to consider, whether, if some powerful friend had placed you in an opulent and comfortable station, and in the general conduct of your affairs, had discovered the most disinterested kindness, you would not ascribe any occasional discouragements you received, to some unknown reason or cause, rather than to his unfaithfulness or cruelty? Ought not the experience which we have had, and the discovery which all nature affords, of the divine

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divine goodness, to lead us to put a like construction on the evils which we suffer from a hand that hath so frequently loaded us with good?——Have we forgotten, in the midst of our complaints, who brought us into the light of day; who watched over our helpless infancy; who reared our growing childhood; and, through ten thousand surrounding dangers, has been our protector and guardian until this day? How often has he rescued us from sickness and death, and made our hearts glad with unexpected comforts? Now, that some cloud is thrown over our prosperity, or some blessing withdrawn, in which for a time we had rejoiced, can we imagine that there is no good cause for this change of his proceeding? Shall we suspect that his nature is entirely altered? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* No; let us say with the Psalmist, *This is my infirmity; but I will remember the works of the Lord. I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High* *.——One signal work of

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* Psalm lxxvii. 9. 10.

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the Most High, at least, let us remember, and rejoice in the remembrance of it; even that final remedy which he has provided for all the evils occasioned by sin, in the redemption of the world accomplished by Jesus Christ. *He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all*, will he, in any case, wantonly afflict the children of men with superfluous and unnecessary sorrows? Is not this a proof so satisfactory, so express and demonstrative, of the gracious purposes of God, as should dispose us to take in good part every thing which proceeds from him? Consider,

In the *second* place, that the good things we receive from God are undeserved, the evils we suffer are justly merited. Every reasonable person must feel the weight of this consideration, for producing patience and submission. For, though to suffer at any rate be grievous, yet to suffer unjustly is doubly galling. Whereas, when one receives a mixed portion, whereof the goods are above his deserts, and the evils below his deserts, to complain, in such a case,

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case, is unreasonable; there is more ground for being thankful. All, it is true, have not deserved evil equally. Yet all of us deserve it more or less; and to merit good at the hand of the Lord, is what none of us can pretend. At the best, we are but *unprofitable servants.* Even this is more than we are entitled to claim. For if God were to *enter into judgment* with us, who could stand before him? who could justify himself in his sight? When the most inoffensive compare their conduct with God's holy law; when they reflect upon the duties they have omitted, and the actual guilt they have contracted, they will find more reason to accuse themselves, than to complain of the divine chastisement. Whatever innocence any of us may plead, nay, whatever merit we may claim, with respect to men and the world, we suffer no more than what we deserve from the Governour of the world; and of his displeasure, we know that the wrath of man is no other than the instrument.

Not only all of us have done evil, but what ought to be particularly attended to, God has a just title to punish us for it. Although

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Although a man know that he deserves punishment, yet he will not allow every one to inflict it. A child will submit to his parents, a servant to his master, a subject to the magistrate, when he would not bear correction from another hand. But no parent can have so complete a right to authority over his children, no master over his servants, no magistrate over his subjects, as the Almighty hath over us. When we were born, we brought nothing with us into God's world. During our continuance in it, we have lived on the good things which God has pleased to lend us; and of which, God and our own conscience know that we have made but a sorry improvement. When he thinks proper to take any of them away, no wrong is done us; for they were not ours. To have enjoyed them so long, was a favour. To enjoy them always was what we neither deserved, nor had any title to expect.

In the *third* place, the good things which at different times we have received and enjoyed, are much greater than the evils

evils which we suffer. Of this fact, I am sensible it will be difficult to persuade the afflicted. But would they weigh, in a fair balance, the whole of their circumstances, they would find it true. Whatever persons feel at the present, makes so strong an impression upon them, as very commonly to obliterate the memory of all the past. When one is impressed with some painful disease in his body, or wrung with some sore distress of mind, every former comfort, at that moment, goes for nothing. Life is beheld in all its gloom. A dark cloud seems to hang over it; and it is reviled, as no other than a scene of wretchedness and sorrow. But this is to be unjust to human life, as well as ungrateful to its author.——Let me only desire you to think how many days, how many months, how many years, you have passed in health, and ease, and comfort; how many pleasurable feelings you have had; how many friends you have enjoyed; how many blessings, in short, of different kinds you have tasted; and you will be forced to acknowledge, that more materials of thanksgiving present themselves, than of lamentation and

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complaint.——These blessings, you will say, are past. But though past, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Do they merit no place, in the comparative estimate of the goods and evils of your state? Did you, could you expect, that, in this mutable world, any temporal joy was to last for ever? Has gratitude no influence to form your minds to a calm acquiescence in your benefactor's appointments? What can be more reasonable than to say, "Having in former times received so many "good things from the hand of God, shall "I not now, without murmuring, receive "the few evils which it pleases him to send."

In the *fourth* place, not only the goods of life are, upon the whole, greater than its evils; but the evils which we suffer are seldom, or never, without some mixture of good. As there is no condition on earth of pure unmixed felicity, so there is none so miserable, as to be destitute of every comfort. Entire and complete misery, if ever it take place, is of our own procuring, not of God's sending. None but the most gross and atrocious sinners can be in such a situation,

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situation, as to discover no ray of relief or hope. In the ordinary distresses of life, it is generally our own folly and infirmity which, upon the loss of some one blessing that we had highly prized, deprives us of satisfaction in all other things. Many of our calamities are purely imaginary, and self-created; arising from rivalship or competition with others, and from false opinions of the importance of objects, to which custom and fashion have annexed an ideal value. Were these mistaken opinions once corrected by reason, the evil would disappear and contentment would resume its place. With respect to those calamities which are inflicted by God, his Providence has made this wise and merciful constitution, that, after the first shock, the burden by degrees is lightened. Time brings a gentle and powerful opiate to all misfortunes. What is very violent, cannot last long; and what lasts long, we become accustomed to bear. Every situation that is permanent, at length is felt to be tolerable. The mind accommodates itself to it; and by degrees regains its usual tranquillity. Hence the greatest part of the evils of life are more





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terrible in the previous apprehension, than in the actual feeling; and it seldom happens but, in one corner or other, something is found on which the mind can lay hold for its relief.

How many, for instance, do we behold around us, straitened in their worldly circumstances, and yet finding the means to live cheerfully, with poverty and peace in the same habitation? If we are deprived of friends whom we tenderly loved, are there not still some remaining, from whom we may expect much comfort? If our bodies are afflicted with sore disease, have we not reason to be thankful that our mind continues vigorous and entire; that we are in a situation to look around us for whatever can afford us ease; and that, after the decay of this frail and mouldering tabernacle, we can look forward to a *house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?* — In the midst of all distresses, there remains to every sincere Christian, that mixture of pure and genuine consolation, which springs from the promises and hopes of the gospel. Consider, I beseech you, what a singularly happy distinction this makes in your situation,



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ation, beyond the state of those who, under the various troubles of life, are left *without hope, and without God in the world*; without any thing to look to, but a train of unknown causes and accidents, in which they see no light nor comfort.—Thank the Father of mercies, that into all the evils he sends he infuses this joyful hope, that *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed* in the end, to the virtuous and good. SERMON XVI.

In the *fifth* and last place, as the evils which we suffer are thus alleviated by a mixture of good; so we have reason to believe, that the evils themselves are, in many respects, good. When borne with patience and dignity, they improve and ennoble our character. They bring into exercise several of the manly and heroic virtues; and, by the constancy and fidelity with which we support our trials on earth, prepare us for the highest rewards in heaven.—It has always been found, that the present constitution of human nature cannot bear uninterrupted prosperity, without being corrupted by it. The poisonous weeds which



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spring up in that too luxuriant soil, require the hand of adversity to extirpate them. It is the experience of sorrow and distress that subdues the arrogance of pride, tames the violence of passion, softens the hardness of the selfish heart, and humanizes the temper to feel for the woes of others. Many have had reason to say, that *it was good for them to be afflicted**. *When men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ*, they are apt to *say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? But when they are holden in cords of affliction, then he sheweth them their work and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity* †. Is his case to be deplored as highly calamitous, who, by forfeiting some transient enjoyments of the world, purchases lasting improvement in piety and virtue, and exchanges a few of the good things of this life for the better things of another?

* Pfalm cxix. 71. † Job, xxi. 14.—xxxvi. 8.

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INFLUENCED by such considerations as these, let us look up with reverence to the great Disposer of events; and under any distress with which he is pleased to visit us, let us utter no other voice but this; '*Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*' — Men are too often ingenious in making themselves miserable, by aggravating to their own fancy, beyond bounds, all the evils which they endure. They compare themselves with none but those whom they imagine to be more happy; and complain that upon them alone has fallen the whole load of human sorrows. Would they look with a more impartial eye on the world, they would see themselves surrounded with sufferers; and find that they are only drinking out of that mixed cup which Providence has prepared for all. "I will restore your daughter again to life," said the Eastern sage to a prince who grieved immoderately for the loss of a beloved child, "provided you are able to "engrave on her tomb the names of three "persons who have never mourned." The prince made inquiry after such persons; but found the inquiry vain, and was silent.



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To every reasonable person, who retains the belief of religious principles, many alleviating circumstances, and many arguments for patience, will occur under every distress. If we rest on this firm persuasion, that there is a wise and just Providence which disposes of all events, we shall have reason to conclude, that nothing happens to us here without some good design. Trusting that a happy termination shall at last arrive to the disorders of our present state, we shall be enabled, amidst all the varieties of fortune, to preserve that equanimity which befits Christians, and under every trial to say, *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight.*

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# SERMON XVII.

## On Friendship.

PROVERBS, XXVII. 10.

*Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.—*



WHATEVER relates to the behaviour of men in their social character is of great importance in religion. The duties which spring from that character, form many branches of the great law of charity, which is the favourite precept of Christianity. They, therefore, who would separate such duties from a religious spirit, or who at most treat them as only the inferiour parts of it, do a real injury to religion. They are mistaken friends of piety, who, under the

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the notion of exalting it, place it in a sort of insulated corner, disjoined from the ordinary affairs of the world, and the connections of men with one another. On the contrary, true piety influences them all. It acts as a vivifying spirit, which animates and enlivens, which rectifies and conducts them. It is no less friendly to men than zealous for the honour of God; and by the generous affections which it nourishes, and the beneficent influence which it exerts on the whole of conduct, is fully vindicated from every reproach which the infidel would throw upon it.— In this view, I am now to discourse on the nature and duties of virtuous friendship, as closely connected with the true spirit of religion. It is a subject which the inspired philosopher, who is the author of this book of Proverbs, has thought worthy of his repeated notice; and in many passages has bestowed the highest eulogiums on friendship among good men. *As ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth*

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*the countenance of his friend. Make sure of thy friend; for faithful are the wounds of a friend. A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.— Thine own friend, and thy father's friend,* it is said in the text, *forsake not.*

I MUST begin the subject, by observing, that there are among mankind friendships of different kinds, or at least, connexions which assume that name. When they are no more than confederacies of bad men, they ought to be called conspiracies rather than friendships. Some bond of common interest, some league against the innocent and unsuspecting, may have united them for a time. But they are held together only by a rope of sand. At bottom they are all rivals, and hostile to one another. Their friendship can subsist no longer than interest cements them. Every one looks with a jealous eye on his supposed friend; and watches the first favourable opportunity to desert, or to betray.

Friendships

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Friendships too there are of a different kind, and of a more respectable nature, formed by the connection of political parties. It is not, perhaps, on selfish or crooked designs that such friendships are originally founded. Men have been associated together, by some public interest, or general cause, or for defence against some real or imagined danger; and connections thus formed, often draw men into close union, and inspire for a season no small degree of cordial attachment. When upon just and honourable principles this union is founded, it has proved on various occasions, favourable to the cause of liberty and good order among mankind. At the same time, nothing is more ready to be abused than the name of public spirit, and a public cause. It is a name, under which private interest is often sheltered, and selfish designs are carried on. The unwary are allured by a specious appearance; and the heat of faction usurps the place of the generous warmth of friendship.

It is not of such friendships, whether of the laudable or the suspicious kind, that

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that I am now to discourse; but of private friendships, which grow neither out of interested designs nor party zeal; but which flow from that similarity of dispositions, that corresponding harmony of minds, which endears some person to our heart, and makes us take as much part in his circumstances, fortunes, and fate, as if they were our own. *The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul**. Such friendships certainly are not unreal; and, for the honour of human nature, it is to be hoped, are not altogether unfrequent, among mankind. —— Happy it is, when they take root in our early years; and are engrafted on the ingenuous sensibility of youth. Friendships, then contracted, retain to the last a tenderness and warmth, seldom possessed by friendships that are formed in the riper periods of life. The remembrance of ancient and youthful connections melts every human heart; and the dissolution of them is, perhaps, the most painful feeling to which we

* 1 Samuel, xviii. 1.

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are exposed here below.——But at whatever period of life friendships are formed, as long as they continue sincere and affectionate, they form, undoubtedly, one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy. By the pleasing communications of all our sentiments which they prompt, they are justly said to double our pleasures and to divide our sorrows. They give a brighter sunshine to the gay incidents of life; and they enlighten the gloom of its darker hours. *A faithful friend*, it is justly and beautifully said, by one of the Apocryphal writers, *is the medicine of life* *. A variety of occasions happen, when to pour forth the heart to one whom we love and trust, is the chief comfort, perhaps the only relief, we can enjoy. Miserable is he who, shut up within the narrow inclosure of selfish interest, has no person to whom he can at all times, with full confidence, expand his soul.

SINCE cordial friendship is so great a blessing to human life, let us proceed to

* Ecclesiasticus, vi. 16.

consider

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consider what duties it requires, and by what methods it may be cultivated to most advantage. The fundamental qualities of true friendship are, constancy and fidelity. Without these material ingredients it is of no value. An inconstant man is not capable of friendship. He may perhaps have affections which occasionally glow in his heart; which excite fondness for amiable qualities; or connect him with seeming attachment to one whom he esteems, or to whom he has been obliged. But after these feelings have lasted for a little, either fancied interest alienates him, or some new object attracts him; and he is no longer the same person to those whom he once loved. A man of this inconstant mind cannot be said to have any mind at all. For where there is no fixedness of moral principle, occasional feelings are of no value; mind is of no effect; and with such persons it is never desirable to have any connection. Where constancy is wanting, there can be no fidelity, which is the other basis of friendship. For all friendship supposes entire confidence and trust; supposes the



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seal of secrecy to be inviolable; supposes promises and engagements to be sacred; and no advantage of our own to be pursued, at the expence of our friend's honour. An inconstant man is despicable. A faithless man is base.

But supposing neither constancy nor fidelity to be altogether wanting, still however friendship is in hazard of suffering from the follies, and unreasonable humours, to which all of us are liable. It is to be regarded as a tender plant in an unfavourable soil, which, in order to its flourishing, requires to be reared and nursed with care. The following directions may be of use for promoting its cultivation, and preserving it from whatever might be apt to blast and wither it.

In the *first* place, let me advise you not to expect perfection in any with whom you contract friendship. It holds in general with respect to all worldly pursuits, that the more moderate our expectations are, they are likely to be the more successful. If, in any situation of life, we hope to possess complete happiness, we may depend

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depend on receiving mortifications. If, in any person, we trust to find nothing but perfection, we may be assured that, on longer acquaintance, we shall meet with disappointments. In the case of friendship, this admonition is the more necessary to be given, as a certain warmth and enthusiasm belong to it, which are apt to carry us beyond the bounds of nature. In young minds, especially, a disposition of this kind is often found to take place. They form to themselves romantic ideas, gathered perhaps from fictitious histories, of the high and heroic qualities which belong to human nature. All those qualities they ascribe, without reserve or limitation, to the person with whom they wish to enter into intimate friendship; and on the least failure appearing, alienation instantly follows. Hence many a friendship, hastily perhaps contracted, is as hastily dissolved, and disgust succeeds to violent attachment. — Remember, my friends, that a faultless character on earth is a mere chimera. Many failings you experience in yourselves. Be not surprised when you discover the like in others,

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of whom you had formed the highest opinion. The best and most estimable persons are they, in whom the fewest material defects are found; and whose great and solid qualities counterbalance the common infirmities of men. It is to these qualities you are to look in forming friendships; to good sense and prudence which constitute the basis of every respectable character; to virtue, to good temper, to steadiness of affection; and according to the union of those dispositions, esteem yourselves happy in the friend whom you choose.

In the *second* place, I must admonish you not to be hurt by differences of opinion arising in intercourse with your friends. It is impossible for these not to occur. Perhaps no two persons were ever cast so exactly in the same mould, as to think always in the same manner on every subject. It was wisely contrived by Providence, that diversity of sentiment should take place among men, on purpose to exercise our faculties, and to give variety to human life. Perpetual uniformity of

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of thought would become monotonous and insipid.—When it is with regard to trifles that diversity or contrariety of opinions shows itself, it is childish in the last degree, if this become the ground of estranged affection. When from such a cause there arises any breach of friendship, human weakness is then discovered in a mortifying light. In matters of serious moment, the sentiments of the best and worthiest may vary from those of their friends, according as their lines of life diverge; or as their temper and habits of thought present objects under different points of view. But, among candid and liberal minds, unity of affection will still be preserved. No man has any title to erect his own opinions into an universal and infallible standard, and the more enlarged that any man's mind is, the more readily he will overlook difference in sentiments, as long as he is pursuaded that the mind of his friend is upright, and that he follows the dictates of conscience and integrity.



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In the *third* place, It is material to the preservation of friendship, that openness of temper and manners, on both hands, be cultivated. Nothing more certainly dissolves friendship, than the jealousy which arises from darkness and concealment. If your situation oblige you to take a different side from your friend, do it openly. Avow your conduct; avow your motives; as far as honour allows, disclose yourselves frankly; seek no cover from unnecessary and mysterious secrecy. Mutual confidence is the soul of friendship. As soon as that is destroyed, or even impaired, it is only a show of friendship that remains. What was once cordial intimacy, degenerates first into formal civility. Constraint on both sides next succeeds; and disgust or hatred soon follow.—The maxim that has been laid down by certain crooked politicians, to behave to a friend with the same guarded caution as we would do to an enemy, because it is possible that he may one day become such, discovers a mind which never was made for the enjoyments of friendship. It is a maxim which, not unreasonably I admit,

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admit, may find place in those political and party friendships, of which I before spoke, where personal advancement is always in view. But it is altogether inconsistent with the spirit of those friendships, which are formed, and understood to be nourished, by the heart. SERMON XVII.

THE *fourth* advice which I give is, To cultivate, in all intercourse among friends, gentle and obliging manners. It is a common errour to suppose, that familiar intimacy supersedes attention to the lesser duties of behaviour; and that, under the notion of freedom, it may excuse a careless, or even a rough demeanour. On the contrary, an intimate connection can only be kept up by a constant wish to be pleasing and agreeable. The nearer and closer that men are brought together, the more frequent that the points of contact between them become, there is the greater necessity for the surface being smooth, and every thing being removed that can grate or offend.—Let no harshness, no appearance of neglect, no supercilious affection of superiority, occur in the intercourse of



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friends. A tart reply, a proneness to rebuke, a captious and contradictious spirit, are often known to embitter domestick life, and to set friends at variance. In those smaller articles of behaviour, where men are too apt to be careless, and to indulge their humour without restraint, the real character is often understood to break forth and shew itself. It is by no means enough, that in all matters of serious interest, we think ourselves ready to prove the sincerity of our friendship. These occur more rarely. The ordinary tenor of life is composed of small duties and offices, which men have occasion daily to perform; and it is only by rendering daily behaviour agreeable, that we can long preserve the comforts of friendship.

In the *fifth* place, Let me caution you not to listen rashly to evil reports against your friends. When upon proper grounds you have formed a connection, be slow of believing any thing against the friend whom you have chosen. Remember, that there is among mankind a spirit of malignity, which too often takes pleasure in disturbing

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ing the society of those who appear to enjoy one another. The Scripture hath warned us, that there is *a whisperer who separateth chief friends; there is a false witness who soweth discord among brethren.* Give not therefore a ready ear to the officious insinuations of those who, under the guise of friendly concern, come to admonish you, that you ought to stand on your guard against those whom they see you disposed to trust. Consider, whether, under this fair appearance, there may not lurk some secret envy and rivalry, or some concealed interest. Chase not every flying report. Suffer not the poison of jealousy easily to taint your mind, and break your peace. A wide difference there is between that weak credulity which allows itself to be imposed upon blindly, and that dark and suspicious spirit which is always inclined to the evil side. It forms part of the character of a wise and good man, that he is not prone to *take up a reproach against his neighbour.*

In the *sixth* and last place, Let me exhort you not to desert your friend in danger



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or distress. Too many there are in the world, whose attachment to those they call their friends is confined to the day of their prosperity. As long as that continues, they are, or appear to be affectionate and cordial. But as soon as their friend is under a cloud, they begin to withdraw, and to separate their interests from his. In friendships of this sort, the heart, assuredly, has never had much concern. For the great test of true friendship, is constancy in the hour of danger, adherence in the season of distress.—When your friend is calumniated, then is the time, openly and boldly to espouse his cause. When his situation is changed, or his fortunes are falling, then is the time of affording prompt and zealous aid. When sickness or infirmity occasion him to be neglected by others, that is the opportunity which every real friend will seize, of redoubling all the affectionate attentions which love suggests. These are the important duties, the sacred claims of friendship, which religion and virtue enforce on every worthy mind.—To show yourselves warm, after this manner, in the cause of your

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your friend, commands esteem, even from those who have personal interest in opposing him. This honourable zeal of friendship has, in every age, attracted the veneration of mankind. It has consecrated to the latest posterity the names of those who have given up their fortunes, and have even exposed their lives, in behalf of the friends whom they loved; while ignominy and disgrace have ever been the portion of them, who deserted their friends in the evil day. *Thine own friend forsake not.*

BEFORE concluding, it must not be forgotten, that the injunction of the Wise Man in the text is accompanied with this remarkable expression; not only *thine own friend*, but also, *thy father's friend, forsake not.* These words bring back to our remembrance the days of former years; and suggest a sentiment which cannot but touch every feeling heart. Thine own friend may be dear; thy father's friend ought to be sacred. As long as life remains in any human breast, the memory of those ancient ties should remain, which connected

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connected us once with our father, and our father's house. Thy father has perhaps, long ago, gone down to the dust. But when you recal the innocent days of childhood and youth; when you think of those family transactions, which once gladdened your hearts; your father's friend, in the midst of these, will rise to your remembrance. There was a time when you accosted him with respect, or looked up to him with fondness, and was made happy by his kindly notice. Does such a one now survive, and shall he not receive from you some portion of filial reverence and honour? To disregard and neglect him, is to spurn your father's memory; is to insult the ashes of him who now sleeps in the grave; is to transmit yourselves to those who shall succeed you, as unfeeling and base. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.*

I HAVE pointed out some of the chief duties which belong to virtuous friendship; and some of the principal means by which this sacred bond should be preserved unbroken; this holy flame should be

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be kept alive in the human breast. The spirit, and sentiments, which I have studied to inspire, are such as virtue breathes, and such as true piety should increase. It is thus we fulfil that great law of love which our Divine Master taught. It is thus we prepare ourselves for those happy regions, where *charity never faileth*; where, in the presence of the God of Love, eternal and invariable friendships unite together all the blessed; friendships, which, by no human infirmity disturbed, by death never separated, shall constitute, throughout endless ages, a great and distinguished portion of the celestial felicity.

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# SERMON XVIII.

## On the CONDUCT to be held with regard to FUTURE EVENTS.

PROVERBS, XXVII. 1.

*Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

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FROM these words I purpose to discourse of the proper conduct which we ought to hold, with regard to futurity, amidst the present uncertainties of life. Time and life are always going on, and to each of us are preparing changes in our state. What these may be, whether for the better or for the worse, we cannot tell; as it hath pleased the wisdom of Providence, to cover futurity with a veil which no

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no mortal can lift up. In the mean time, none of us can avoid forming designs, and laying plans, for the time to come. The present moment is never sufficient to give full employment to the active mind of man, without some excursions into futurity; and in these excursions, the present is often wholly spent. It is therefore of the highest consequence, that a proper direction be given to the mind, in its employments of thought relating to futurity. Otherwise, in the prospects which we take of that unknown region, false hopes, or ill-grounded fears, shall flatter or torment us in vain. *We know not*, as the Wise Man tells us, *what a day may bring forth*. It may, very probably, produce something that we had not looked for; and therefore, instead of *boasting ourselves of to-morrow*, as the multitude are apt to do, it becomes us to be disciplined and prepared, for whatever it may bring. SERMON XVIII.

It is needless to spend much time in confirming the truth, which is the foundation of the admonition in the text; in



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proving, either that change and mutability belong to our present state, or that the changes of it cannot be foreseen by us. These are truths so obvious and confessed, that an attempt to confirm them is like proving that all men are to die. At the same time, obvious as they are, it were to be wished, that the thoughts of men dwelt upon them more. For by a strange but prevailing deception, it would seem, from the general conduct of mankind, that almost every one thinks his own case an exception from the general law; and that he may build plans with as much confidence on his present situation, as if some assurance had been given him that it were never to change. Hence it has been often observed by serious persons, that there is no more general cause to which the vices of men can be ascribed, their forgetfulness of God and their neglect of duty, than to their presuming upon the continuance of life, of pleasure, and prosperity.

Look but a little way, my friends, into your own state; and you must unavoidably perceive that, from the beginning, it has

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has been so contrived by Providence, that there should be no permanent stability to man's condition on earth. The seeds of alteration are every where sown. In your health, life, possessions, connexions, pleasures, there are causes of decay imperceptibly working; secretly undermining the foundations of what appears to you the most stable; continually tending to abolish the present form of things, and to bring forward new appearances, and new objects in their order: So that nothing is, or can be, stationary on earth. All changes, and passes. It is a stream which is ever flowing; a wheel which is ever turning round. When you behold the tree covered with blossoms in the spring, or loaded with fruit in the autumn, as well may you imagine, that those blossoms, or that fruit, are to remain in their place through the whole year, as believe that human affairs are to continue, for to-day and to-morrow, for this year and the next, proceeding in the same tenour. To render this reflection still more serious, think, I pray you, on what small and inconsiderable causes those changes depend, which affect

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affect the fortunes of men, throughout their whole lives. How soon is evil done! There needs no great bustle or stir, no long preparation of events, to overturn what seems most secure, and to blast what appears most flourishing. A gale of wind rises on the ocean; and the vessel which carried our friends, or our fortunes, is overwhelmed in the deep. A spark of a candle falls by night in some neglected corner; and the whole substance of families is consumed in flames before the morning. A casual blow, or a sudden fall, deranges some of our internal parts; and the rest of life is distress and misery. It is awful to think, at the mercy of how many seeming contingencies we perpetually lie, for what we call happiness in this world.

In the midst, however, of all these apparent contingencies, plans and designs for the future are every day formed; pursuits are undertaken; and life proceeds in its usual train. Fit and proper it is, that life should thus proceed. For the uncertainty of to-morrow was never designed by Providence, to deter us from acting or planning

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planning to-day; but only to admonish us, that we ought to plan, and to act, soberly and wisely.—What that wise and sober conduct is which becomes us, what the rules and precautions are, which, in such a state as ours, respect futurity, I now proceed to show. They may be comprehended in the following directions. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; Despair not of to-morrow; Delay not till to-morrow what is proper to be done to-day; Prepare thyself for whatever to-morrow may bring forth; Build thy hopes of happiness on something more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow will produce.

I. In the words of the text, *Boast not thyself of to-morrow*; that is, never presume arrogantly on futurity; in the most fair and promising state of fortune, beware of pride and vanity; beware of resting wholly upon yourselves, and forgetting Him who directs the changes of this mutable state. If there be any virtues which the uncertain condition of the world inculcates on man, they are, assuredly, mo-



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deration and humility. Man was, for this end, placed in a world, where he knows so little of what is before him, that he might be impressed with a sense of his dependence on the Ruler of the world; that he might feel the importance of acquiring favour and protection from Heaven, by a life of piety and virtue; and that, not knowing how soon his own condition may be the same with that of the most wretched, he might be prompted to act towards all his brethren the humane and friendly part. —— The favours which Providence bestows upon him at present, he ought to receive with thankfulness, and may enjoy with cheerfulness. Though commanded not to *boast himself of to-morrow*, the meaning of the precept is not, that he must be sad to-day. Rejoice he may in the day of prosperity; but certainly, *Rejoice with trembling*, is the inscription that should be written on all human pleasures.

As for them who, intoxicated with those pleasures, become giddy and insolent; who, flattered by the illusions of prosperity, make light of every serious admoni-

tion

tion which the changes of the world give them, what can I say too strong to alarm them of their danger?——They have said to themselves, *My mountain stands strong, and shall never be moved. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly. I shall never see adversity.* — Rash and wretched men! are you sensible how impious such words are? To the world, perhaps, you dare not utter them; but they speak the secret language of your hearts. Know, you are usurping upon Providence; you are setting Heaven at defiance; you are not only preparing sharper stings for yourselves, when the changes of life shall come, but you are accelerating those changes; you are fast bringing ruin upon your own heads. For God will not suffer pride in man; and the experience of all ages hath shown, how careful he is to check it. In a thousand memorable instances, the course of his government has been visibly pointed against it. *He showeth strength with his arm, and scattereth the proud in the imaginations of their hearts. The day of the Lord is upon every one that is proud and lifted up; to humble the lofty looks of man,*



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*and to stain the pride of all glory* *. Some of the ministers of divine displeasure are commissioned to go forth; and to humble, without delay, the *boasters of to-morrow*.

II. As we are not to boast, so neither are we to despair, of to-morrow. The former admonition was directed to those whom prosperity had elated with vain hopes. This is designed for those whom a more adverse situation in life has filled with fears and alarms of what is to come. The reason of both admonitions is the same, *thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*. It may bring forth some unexpected misfortunes; and therefore thou shouldst be humble in prosperity. It may bring forth some unforeseen relief; and therefore thou shouldst hope under distress.—It is too common with mankind, to be totally engrossed and overcome by present events. Their present condition, whatever it is, they are apt to imagine, will never change; and hence by prosperity they are lifted up, and by adversity are

* Luke, i. 15. Isaiah, ii. 11. xxiii. 9.

dejected

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dejected and broken; prone, in the one case to forget God; in the other, to repine against him. Whereas, the doctrine, which the changes of the world perpetually inculcate, is, that no state of external things should appear so important, or should so affect and agitate our spirits, as to deprive us of a calm, an equal, and a steady mind. Man knoweth neither the good, nor the evil, which is before him. In your *patience, therefore possess your souls*: trusting in the day of sorrow, that God hath not *forgotten to be gracious*; and that, *though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh* to the upright *in the morning*. SERMON XVIII.

Distress not yourselves, then, with anxious fears about to-morrow. Let me exhort you to dismiss all solicitude, which goes beyond the bounds of prudent precaution. Anxiety, when it seizes the heart, is a dangerous disease, productive both of much sin, and much misery. It acts as a corrosive of the mind. It eats out our present enjoyments, and substitutes, in their place, many an acute pain. —The Wise Man, in the text, has advised us *not to boast of to-morrow*; and our Sa-



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viour has instructed us to *take no thought for to-morrow* *. Both these directions, properly understood, are entirely consistent; and the great rule of conduct, respecting futurity, is compounded of them both; requiring us, neither arrogantly to presume on to-morrow, nor to be anxiously and fearfully solicitous about it. *The morrow*, says our Saviour, *shall take thought for the things of itself.* We shall be better able to judge of the course most proper for us to hold, when events have begun to come forward in their order. Their presence often suggests wiser counsels and more successful expedients, than it is possible for us to contrive at a distance. By excess of solicitude beforehand, we frequently introduce that confusion of mind, and that hurry and disorder of spirits, which bring us into the most unfavourable state for judging soundly. ——Wherefore, never indulge either anxiety, or despair about futurity. Affright not yourselves with imaginary terrours. Anticipate not evils, which perhaps may never

* Matth. vi. 34.

come,

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come. Make the best which you can of this day, in the fear of God, and in the practice of your duty; and, having done so, leave to-morrow to itself. *Sufficient for the day*, when it comes, *will be the evil thereof.* SERMON XVIII.

III. Delay not till to-morrow any thing which is fit and proper to be done to-day. Remember, that thou art not the lord of to-morrow. Thou art so far from having any title to dispose of it, that thou art ignorant of the most material circumstances relating to it; not only of what it shall bring forth, but whether thou shalt live to see it.—Notwithstanding the uncontrovertible evidence of this truth, procrastination has throughout every age, been the ruin of mankind. Dwelling amidst endless projects of what they are hereafter to do, they cannot so properly be said to live, as to be always about to live; and the future has ever been the gulph in which the present is swallowed up and lost.—Hence arise many of those misfortunes which befal men in their worldly concerns. What might at present be arranged in their cir-



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cumstances with advantage, being delayed to another opportunity, cannot be arranged at all. To-morrow being loaded with the concerns of to-day, in addition to its own, is clogged and embarrassed. Affairs, which have been postponed, multiply and crowd upon one another; till at last, they prove so intricate and perplexed, and the pressure of business becomes so great, that nothing is left, but to sink under the burden. Of him, therefore, who indulges this lingering and delaying spirit in worldly matters, it is easy to prognosticate that the ruin is not far off.

Evils of the same kind, arising from the same cause, overtake men, in their moral and spiritual interests. There are few, but who are sensible of some things in their character and behaviour, which ought to be corrected, and which, at one time or other, they intend to correct; some headstrong passion, which they design to subdue; some bad habit, which they purpose to reform; some dangerous connection, which they are resolved to break off. But the convenient season for these reformations is not yet come. Certain obstacles

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obstacles are in the way, which they expect by-and-by to surmount; and therefore they go on in peace for the present, in their usual courses, trusting, at a future day, to begin their designed improvement. In the mean time the angel of death descends; and, in the midst of their distant plans, executes his commission, and carries them away.—Guard against delusions of this kind, which have been fatal to so many.—Thou art now in tranquillity, in health, in possession of a calm mind. Improve these advantages, for performing all that becomes thee, as a man, and as a Christian; for, who can tell how long thou shalt be permitted to enjoy them? New alterations of fortune may be just coming forward; new troubles in publick, or in private life, about to arise; new exigencies ready to throw thee into some condition, which shall leave thee neither leisure nor opportunity to execute any of the good purposes thou hast at present in thy mind. Wherefore, trifle no longer with what is so serious, and what may be so critical; but *to-day*, *while it is called to-day*, listen to the voice of God, and do his works.

*Do*

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*Do now*, as the Wise Man advises, *with thy might whatsoever thy hand findeth to do; for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest* *. —— Instead of delaying till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, let me exhort you,

IV. To be every day prepared for whatever to-morrow may bring forth. There is a certain preparation for the vicissitudes of life, in which the multitude are sufficiently busied; providing, as they think, against whatever may happen, by increasing their riches, and strengthening themselves by friends, connections, and worldly honours. But these bulwarks which they erect, are totally insufficient against the dreaded storm. It is to some other quarter we must look for our defence; for when it is the world itself, whose changes we have reason to dread, the world, and the things of it, cannot afford us protection. The best preparation for all the uncertainties of futurity consists, in a well-

* Eccles. ix. 10.

ordered

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ordered mind, a good conscience, and a cheerful submission to the will of Heaven. You know not what shall be on to-morrow. But there is one who knows it well; for his decree hath fixed it. To him look up with reverence; and say, "*Not* "*my will, but thine be done*; what thou ap- "pointest is ever wise, and just, and good." Seek to fulfil the part which he hath assigned you; to do the things which he hath commanded you to do; and leave all the rest to him. Whatever to-morrow brings forth, let it find you employed *in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God*; and then you shall meet to-morrow without fear, when you meet it without the upbraidings of guilt.

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If it shall bring forth to you any unexpected good, prepare to receive it with gratitude, temperance, and modesty. If it shall bring forth evil, prepare to receive it with manly fortitude. Let no events of any kind derange your equanimity, or shake your constancy. Contract your desires, and moderate your hopes. Expect not more from the world than it is able to afford

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afford you. Take it for granted, that what is naturally mutable, will one day change; that what was designed to be transient, will pass away.—Look forward to futurity without impatience. Be not desirous to know it. It belongs to God. Let him bring forward the events of the world, in his own way. Imagine that you continually hear those words, which our Lord once addressed to Peter, when he was inquiring about what was to happen to a fellow-disciple, *What is that to thee? Follow thou me.* Amidst all the uncertainty of future events, this road of clear and plain duty lies before you; follow Christ, and enquire no farther. Seek no crooked path, in order to avoid impending dangers. *Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left*; but *commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring to pass the desires of thy heart.*

V. Build your hopes of happiness on somewhat more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow are likely to produce. From what has been said, you may clearly perceive, that he who rests

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rests wholly upon this world, builds his house upon the sand. This life, by means of wisdom and virtue, may be rendered to a good man, a tolerable, nay a comfortable state. But he who expects complete happiness from it, will be greatly deceived. Man in his most flourishing condition, were much to be pitied, if he was destitute of any higher hope. Rolling from change to change, throughout all the days of his life, with a dark and unknown prospect always before him in futurity, what would avail a few short interrupted glimpses of happiness, which, from time to time, he was permitted to enjoy? Can we believe, that only for such a state as this, man was designed by his great and good Creator? — No: Let us *bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* Here is the Rock on which the mind, however tossed by the storms of life, can securely rest. Here is the object to which a wise man will bend his chief attention, that,



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after having acted his part on earth with fidelity and honour, he may be enabled, through the merits of his Saviour, to look for a place in the mansions of eternal and untroubled peace. This prospect is the great corrective of the present vanity of human life. It gives significancy and importance to its most transitory scenes; and, in the midst of its mutability, discovers one fixed point of rest. He who is habitually influenced by the hope of immortality, will be able to look without dismay on the changes of the world. He will neither boast of to-morrow, nor be afraid of it; but will pass through the varieties of life with a manly and unbroken mind; with a noble superiority to those fears and expectations, those cares and sorrows, which agitate the multitude.—Such are the native effects of Christian faith and hope. To them alone it belongs, to surmount all the discouragements to which we are now exposed; to render our life comfortable, and our death blessed; nay, to make *the day of our death, better than the day of our birth.*

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# SERMON XIX.

## On following the MULTITUDE to do EVIL.

EXODUS, xxiii. 2.

*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*—

IN this world, we are placed as companions and assistants to one another. Depending, for most of the comforts of life, on mutual intercourse and aid, it was necessary, that we should be formed to desire the company, and to take pleasure in the good-will, of our fellows. But this sociability of man, though essential to his present condition, has, like many other good principles, been unhappily warped from its original purpose; and in the pre- SERMON XIX.



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sent state of the world, has proved the cause of much evil. For, as vice has abounded in every age, it hath propagated itself much more easily by the assistance of this social disposition. We naturally mould ourselves on the pattern of prevailing manners; and corruption is communicated from one to another. By mutually giving, and taking, the example of sinful liberties, licentiousness spreads and grows; each justifies himself by his neighbour; and the multitude of sinners strengthens one another's hands to commit iniquity. In all the ages of the world, custom has had more power than reason. Few take the trouble of inquiring what is the right path; the greater part content themselves with following that in which the multitude have gone before them. No exhortation, therefore, is more necessary to be frequently given, and to be seriously enforced, than that which we receive from the text; *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*

To acquire a full view of any danger to which we are exposed, is the first measure

sure to be taken in order to our safety. Let us then begin the subject with considering how much we are in hazard of being misled into vice by the general manners which we behold around us.—No virtue is more necessary to a Christian, but scarcely is there any more difficult to be put in practice, than that firmness of mind which can enable a man to maintain his principles, and stand his ground against the torrent of custom, fashion, and example. Example has upon all minds a secret and insinuating influence, even when we ourselves are insensible of its operation. We imperceptibly slide into some resemblance of the manners of those with whom we have frequent intercourse. This often shows itself, in the most indifferent things. But the resemblance is still more readily contracted, when there is something within ourselves, that leans to the same side which is countenanced by the practice of others. We are always glad to find any apology for indulging our inclinations and passions; and the example of the multitude too readily suggests that apology. Even before corruption has made great

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progress in our hearts, sometimes mere complaisance and good-nature incline us to fall in with the ways of others. Sometimes timidity and false shame prevent our differing from them: Frequently expectation and interest impel us strongly to comply. How great is the danger we incur, when, in times of prevailing vice, all these principles of imitation and compliance unite together against our virtue?

The world is too justly said by Scripture, to *lie in wickedness:* it is a school wherein every vice is taught, and too easily learned. Even from our earliest childhood, false sentiments are instilled into our minds. We are bred up in admiration of the external show of life. We are accustomed, as soon as we can understand any thing, to hear riches and honours spoken of as the chief goods of men, and proposed to us as the objects to which our future pursuits are to be directed. We see the measures of outward respect and deference taken from these alone. Religion and virtue are recommended to us, in a formal manner, by our teachers and instructors; but all improvements of the



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mind and heart are visibly placed, by the world, in an inferior rank to the advantages of fortune. Vices that chance to be fashionable, are treated as slight failings; and coloured over, in common discourse, with those soft and gentle names which express no condemnation. We enter, perhaps, on the world, with good principles, and an aversion to downright vice. But when, as we advance in life, we become initiated in that mystery of iniquity, which is called the way of the world; when we meet with deceit and artifice in all ranks of men; when we behold iniquity, authorised by great names, and often rewarded with success and advancement, our original good impressions too soon decay. The practice of the multitude renders vice familiar to our thoughts; and gradually wears off the abhorrence with which we once beheld it. We begin to think, that what is so very general, cannot be highly criminal. The malignity of sin appears diminished, by so many being sharers in the reproach; and instead of men's vices detracting, as they ought to do, from our good opinion of the men, SERMON XII.



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our attachment to the men oftener reconciles us to the vices of which they are guilty.

The countenance which sin receives from the practice of the multitude, not only removes the restraints which are imposed by modesty and shame; but, such is the degeneracy of the world, the shame is too often employed against the cause of religion and virtue. The ridicule of the giddy and unthinking bears down the conviction of the sober and modest. Against their own belief, they appear to adopt the notions of the infidel; and against their own choice, they join in the vices of the libertine; that they may not be reproached as persons of a narrow mind, and still enslaved to the prejudices of education. How much reason is there to believe that, merely from this timidity of temper, many, whose principles are on the side of religion and virtue, are nevertheless found *walking in the way of sinners, and sitting in the chair of the scornful?* —Interest, too, often coincides with this weakness of disposition, in tempting such persons to follow the multitude. To fall in

in with the prevailing taste, to suit themselves to the passions of the great, or to the humours of the low, with whom they chance to be connected, appears the readiest way to rise in the world. Hence they are naturally led to relinquish the firmness of an upright character, for that supple and versable turn, which accommodates itself to the times, and assumes whatever appearance seems most convenient for interest.——Such are the dangers to which we are exposed, in times of corruption, of *following the multitude to do evil*; dangers which require our most serious attention and care, in order to guard ourselves against them.—I proceed to lay such considerations before you as may be useful for that purpose. SERMON XIX.

In the *first* place, Let us remember that the multitude are very bad guides; are so far from having a title to implicit regard, that he who blindly follows them may be presumed to err. For prejudice and passion are known to sway the crowd. They are struck by the outside of things; they inquire superficially, admire false appear-



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ances, and pursue false goods. Their opinions are for the most part hastily formed, and of course are variable, floating, and inconsistent. In every age, how small is the number of those who are guided by reason and calm inquiry? How few do we find, who have the wisdom to think and judge for themselves, and have steadiness to follow out their own judgment? Ignorance, and low education, darken the views of the vulgar. Fashion and prejudice, vanity and pleasure, corrupt the sentiments of the great. The example of neither affords any standard of what is right and wise. If the philosopher, when employed in the pursuit of truth, finds it necessary to disregard established prejudices and popular opinion, shall we, in the more important inquiry after the rule of life, submit to such blind guidance as the practice of the many; esteeming whatever they admire, and following wherever they lead? Be assured, that he who sets up the general opinion as the standard of truth, or the general practice as the measure of right, is likely, upon such a foundation, to build no other superstructure except vice

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vice and folly.—If the practice of the multitude be a good pattern for our imitation, their opinions surely should be as good a rule for our belief. Upon this principle, we must exchange Christianity for Paganism or Mahometanism, and the light of the Reformation for the superstitions of Popery; for these latter have ever had, and still have, the numbers and the multitude on their side.—Our Saviour has sufficiently characterised the way of the world, when he describes the *broad road* in which the multitudes go, as the *road which leads to destruction*; and the path which leads to happiness, as a *narrow path*, which fewer find. From which it is an easy inference, that to have the multitude on our side, is so far from affording any presumption of our being safe, that it should lead us to suspect that we are holding the course of danger.

In the *second* place, As the practice of the multitude is no argument of a good practice, so it cannot afford us either justification, or safety, in what is evil.—It affords us, I say, no justification. Truth



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and errour, virtue and vice, are things of immutable nature. The difference between them is grounded on that basis of eternal reason, which no opinions or customs of men can affect or alter. Whether virtue be esteemed, or not, in the world, this makes it neither more nor less estimable in itself. It carries always a divine authority, which men cannot impair. It shines with an essential lustre, which praise cannot brighten, nor reproach tarnish. It has a right to regulate the opinions of men; but by their opinions cannot be controlled. Its nature continues invariably the same, though all the multitude of fools should concur in endeavouring to turn it into ridicule. *Woe unto them*, says the prophet Isaiah, *that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!— Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel* *.

* Isaiah, v. 20. 24.

As

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As the practice of the multitude furnishes no justification to the sinner, so neither does it afford him any safety. Religion is altogether a matter of personal concern. God hath delivered to every man the rule of life; and every man must think and act for himself; because for himself he is to answer. If others be wicked, it will be the worse for them; but it will not, on that account, be the better for us, if we shall be evil also. Let vice be ever so prevalent, it is still that *evil thing which the Lord abhorreth*; and, *though hand join in hand*, the wicked shall not escape unpunished. So far is the number of offenders from furnishing any ground of safety, that it calls more loudly for divine justice to interpose. It is as easy for the Almighty arm to crush a whole guilty society, as to punish a single individual; and when the disobedient subjects of God countenance and strengthen one another in licentiousness, by transgressing in troops and bands, it becomes high time for his government to exert itself, and let its vengeance forth. One could scarcely think that any professor of Christian

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Christian faith would fancy to himself any apology from the way of the world, when he knows that the declared design of his religion was, to distinguish him from the world, which is said to *lie in sin*; and that Christ came to call out for himself a *peculiar people*, whose character it should be, *not to be conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds*.—So little, indeed, can the practice of the world either justify or extenuate vice, that it deserves our serious consideration,

In the *third* place, Whether there be not several circumstances, which peculiarly aggravate the guilt of those who follow the multitude in evil? Do you not, thereby, strengthen the power of sin, and perpetuate the pernicious influence of bad example? By striking off from the corrupted crowd, you might be eminently useful; you might animate and recover many, whom weakness and timidity keep under bondage to the customs of the world: Whereas, by tamely yielding to the current of vice, you render that current stronger

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stronger for carrying others along; you add weight and stability to the bad cause; you lend to the multitude all the force of your example, for drawing others after them to the commission of evil.—While you are thus accessory to the ruin of others, you are, at the same time, stamping your own character with the foulest and deepest impressions of corruption. By surrendering your judgment, and your conscience, to the multitude, you betray the rights, and degrade the honour, of the rational nature. Nothing great or worthy can be expected of him, who, instead of considering what is right in itself, and what part it is fittest for one in his station to act, is only considering what the world will think, or say of him; what sort of behaviour will pass with the fairest show, and be most calculated to please the many. When a man has thus given up the liberty and independence of his mind, we can no longer reckon upon him in any thing. We cannot tell how far he may be carried in vice. There is too much ground to dread, that he will lie, dissemble, and betray; changing himself, without scruple, into

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into every shape that will find favour among those whom he seeks to gain.—While this servility to the world infers baseness towards men, it involves also the highest impiety towards God. It shews that we yield to the world that reverence and submission which is only due to the divine law. We treat the government of the Almighty with scorn; as if his precepts deserved to be obeyed, only when they suited the caprice and the follies of the multitude; and were entitled to no regard, as soon as they contradicted the reigning customs and fashions of the world.—While such conduct carries in it so much wickedness and folly, let us observe,

In the *fourth* place, That the most excellent and honourable character which can adorn a man and a Christian, is acquired by resisting the torrent of vice, and adhering to the cause of God and virtue, against a corrupted multitude. It will be found to hold, in general, that all those who, in any of the great lines of life, have distinguished themselves for thinking profoundly, and acting nobly, have despised popular

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popular prejudices, and departed, in several things, from the common ways of the world. On no occasion is this more requisite for true honour, than where religion and morality are concerned. In times of prevailing licentiousness, to maintain unblemished virtue, and uncorrupted integrity; in a publick or private cause, to stand firm by what is fair and just, amidst discouragements and opposition; despising groundless censure and reproach; disdaining all compliance with public manners, when they are vicious and unlawful; and never ashamed of the punctual discharge of every duty towards God and man;—this is what shows true greatness of spirit, and will force approbation even from the degenerate multitude themselves. "This is "the man," their conscience will oblige them to acknowledge, "whom we are "unable to bend to mean condescensions. "We see it in vain either to flatter or "to threaten him; he rests on a principle "within, which we cannot shake. To this "man you may, on any occasion, safely "commit your cause. He is incapable "of betraying his trust, or deserting his "friend,

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" friend, or denying his faith." Thus *his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon day.*

It is, accordingly, this steady inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superior to all custom and opinion, which peculiarly mark the characters of those, in any age, who have shone as saints or heroes; and has consecrated their memory to all posterity. It was this that obtained to antient *Enoch* the most singular testimony of honour from Heaven. He continued to *walk with God*, when the world apostatised from him. He pleased God, and was beloved of him; so that, living among sinners, he was translated to heaven without seeing death; *Yea, speedily was he taken away, lest wickedness should have altered his understanding, or deceit beguiled his soul* *. When Sodom could not furnish ten righteous men to save it, *Lot* remained unspotted amidst the contagion. He lived like an angel among spirits of darkness; and the destroying flame was not permitted to go forth, till the good man

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 11.

was

was called away by a heavenly messenger from his devoted city. When *all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth*, then lived *Noah*, a righteous man, and a preacher of righteousness. He stood alone, and was scoffed by the profane crew. But they by the deluge were swept away; while on him, Providence conferred the immortal honour, of being the restorer of a better race, and the father of a new world. Such examples as these, and such honours conferred by God on them who withstood the multitude of evil doers, should often be present to our minds. Let us oppose them to the numbers of low and corrupt examples, which we behold around us; and when we are in hazard of being swayed by such, let us fortify our virtue, by thinking of those who, in former times, shone like stars in the midst of surrounding darkness, and are now shining in the kingdom of heaven, *as the brightness of the firmament, for ever and ever.*—As our honour is thus deeply concerned in our acting a stedfast and virtuous part, let us also consider,

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In the *fifth* place, How little, in point of interest, can be gained by the favour of the multitude, and how much will certainly be lost, by following them to do evil. We may, thereby, render ourselves more agreeable to some with whom we are connected; and by artful compliances, may please ourselves with the prospect of promoting our fortune. But these advantages, such as they are, remain doubtful and uncertain. The wind of popular opinion is ever shifting. It will often leave us at a loss what course to steer; and, after all our trouble and anxiety to catch the favourable gale, it may on a sudden forsake us. For the versatility of character, the meanness and inconsistency of conduct, into which a dependant on the multitude is betrayed, frequently render him in the end, an object of contempt to those whom he sought to please. But supposing him successful in his views, no worldly advantages, which are purchased by dishonourable means, can be either solid or lasting. They bring no genuine satisfaction to a man, who is conscious to himself of having given up his principles

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principles to serve the world. As long as he could be satisfied with his own conduct, he might bear up under undeserved discouragement; but when he becomes despicable in his own eyes, worldly honours lose their lustre.—What can the multitude do for you, after you have followed them in evil? They cannot restore to you the peace of an innocent mind, nor heal the sorrows of a wounded spirit, nor shield you from the displeasure of God. They can do little to support you in the hour of affliction, and nothing to deliver your souls in the day of death. Forsaken and disconsolate, the world, for the most part, casts off its votaries in the end; and when you compute the final amount, it will prove a very small consolation, that, as you have had sharers in guilt, you shall have companions also in punishment. SERMON XIX.

Look forward to the issue of things. The multitude of men possess now, in a great measure, the distribution of praise and censure, of success and disappointment, according to their caprice. But this confused and promiscuous distribution is not always to subsist. The day cometh, when we all are to appear before a more discerning Judge,



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and a more impartial tribunal. The day cometh, when our Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven in all the glory of his Father, to unveil every character, and to *render to every man according to his works*. At that day, how shall he lift up his head, who hath been all his life the slave of the world's opinion; who hath moulded his principles, and his practice, solely to please the multitude; who hath been *ashamed of his Saviour and his words*; and, to gain favour with men, hath apostatised from the native sentiments and dictates of his heart? —To say all in one word: there is a contest now between God and the world. These form the opposite sides which divide mankind. Consider well, to which of these you will choose to adhere. On the one side, lie your allegiance, your honour, and your interest; on the other, lie your guilt and your shame. For the one, conscience and reason; for the other, passion and inclination, plead. On the one hand are the approbation of God, immortal honour, and divine rewards; on the other,—remember and beware!—are the stings of conscience, endless punishment, and endless infamy.

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# SERMON XX.

## On the WISDOM of GOD *.

1 TIMOTHY, i. 17.

*Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever! Amen.*

IT is of the highest importance to religious conduct, that our minds be filled with suitable conceptions of the attributes of God. They are the foundations of our reverence for him; and reverence is

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* This concluding discourse was chiefly intended to be a general recapitulation of instances of the wisdom of Providence, several of which have been more fully illustrated in other discourses contained in this or in some of the preceding volumes.



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the foundation of religion. All the divine perfections are interesting to man. Almighty power, in conjunction with Eternity and Omnipresence, naturally inspires solemn awe. Infinite Goodness relieves the mind from that oppression which Power alone would produce; and, from our experience of present benefits, and our remembrance of the past, creates love, gratitude, and trust. In the middle between these stands the contemplation of Divine Wisdom, which conjoins impressions of awe with those of comfort; and, while it humbles us into profound submission, encourages, at the same time, our reliance on that *King eternal, immortal, and invisible*, who is justly styled in the text, *the only wise God.*

Among men, wisdom is a quality entirely different from cunning or craft. It always supposes good and fair intention in the person who possesses it; and imports, that laudable ends are pursued by proper and justifiable means. In like manner, wisdom in the Supreme Being cannot be separated from the rectitude of his nature. It is, in him, an exertion of benevolence; and

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and imports, that the purposes of justice and goodness are carried on and accomplished by means the most effectual. To meditate on some of those instances in which this divine wisdom is displayed cannot but be highly favourable to the impressions both of piety and of virtue. SERMON XX.

IT is difficult to say, whether the natural, or the moral, world, afford the most conspicuous and striking displays of the wisdom of God. Not one, nor many discourses, nor indeed the study and labour of a whole life, were, in any degree, sufficient to explore them. Of the proofs of wisdom which the natural world affords I cannot attempt now to discourse. Any illustration of these would lead to discussions of a scientific kind, which more properly belong to the philosopher; and on which philosophy has often employed itself, with much utility and honour. I shall only take notice, that, in proportion as human knowledge hath enlarged its sphere of research and discovery, in the same proportion hath the wisdom of the Creator struck the minds of all inquirers



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and observers, with the highest admiration. All nature is in truth a scene of wonders. In the disposition of the heavenly bodies, and the general arrangement of the system of the universe; in the structure of the earth; in the endless variety of living creatures that fill it; and in the provision made for them all, to enable them to fulfil the ends of their being; it is not easy to determine, whether power, wisdom, or goodness, be most conspicuous. It belongs not only to *the heavens to declare the glory of God, and to the firmament to shew forth his handy work*; in the smallest and most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of God, equal marks appear of profound design and consummate art. It has been justly said, that there is not a vegetable that grows, nor an insect that moves, but what is sufficient to confound the atheist, and to afford the candid observer endless materials of devout adoration and praise.

When we turn to the moral world, the field of admiration which opens to us is no less extensive and striking. I can only

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only mention a few instances of that exquisite wisdom which every where meets us. SERMON XX.

IN the *first* place, let us attend to the constitution of human nature. Though we are taught by revelation to consider it as now impaired by the fall, yet as it stands we behold the traces of a noble structure, planned and executed with the highest skill. All the powers and faculties bestowed on man are such, as perfectly suit his condition, and adapt him to the purposes for which he was designed. Senses were given him, that he might distinguish what is necessary for the preservation and welfare of his body.——Now, suppose that any one of those senses, the sight, for instance, or the hearing, or the touch, had been in a considerable degree either more blunt, or more acute, than it is at present, what an unhappy change would this have made upon our state? On the one hand, greater imperfection of the organs would have deprived us of all the comfort and advantage which we now enjoy from such powers. On the other hand, a greater degree of exquisite sensibility in them would



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have rendered life a burden to us. Our senses, instead of being inlets to knowledge and pleasure, would then have become constant avenues so uneasiness and pain. Their powers, therefore, are skilfully adjusted to that measure of strength, which allows them to answer the purposes of health, safety, and comfort; without either falling short of this line of usefulness, or improperly, and hurtfully, stretching beyond it.

In the mind, appetites and passions were placed, as the moving powers of the soul, to impel its activity. But as their impulse required regulation and restraint, reason was, at the same time, conferred as the directing power.— Of all our passions, self love and the desire of self-preservation were with the utmost propriety, made the strongest, for a reason which the meanest capacity may comprehend. Every man is most immediately committed by Providence to his own care and charge. He knows his own situation best; and has more opportunities of promoting his own happiness, than he can have of advancing the happiness of any other person. It was therefore fit and wise, that, by the strongest

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strongest instinct, he should be prompted to attend to himself.—At the same time, as no man standing alone is sufficient for his own welfare, it was necessary that, by mutual sympathy and social instincts, we should be drawn to give aid to one another. Here it deserves our particular notice, that the force of those social instincts is, with admirable propriety, proportioned by Providence to the degree of their usefulness and importance *. Thus, that parental affection, which the helpless state of infancy and childhood renders so needful, is made the strongest of them all. Next, come those ties of blood, which prompt mutual kindness among those who are intimately joined together by brotherhood, and other family connections. To these succeeds that valuable instinct of pity, which impels us to assist the distressed, wherever we behold them. To take part with others in their good fortune belongs to man's social nature, and increases the sum of happiness. At the same time, to take part with the prosperous is less necessary than to sympathise with the unhappy; and therefore



* See Serm. II. Vol. iii.

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the principle which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, is made not to be so strong, as that which impels us to *weep with them that weep*.

But they are not only the laudable and important parts of our disposition, which discover the wisdom of the Author of our frame; even our imperfections and follies are by him rendered subservient to useful ends.—Amidst those inequalities of condition, for instance, which the state of human life required, where it was necessary that some should be rich, and others poor, that some should be eminent and distinguished, and others obscure and mean, how seasonable is that good opinion which every one entertains of himself, that self-complacency with which he compares himself to others; and that fond hope, which is ever pleasing him with the prospect of future pleasures and advantages in life? Without those flattering sensations, vain as they often are, how totally insupportable would this world become to many of its inhabitants? Whereas, by means of them, Providence hath contrived to balance, in a great measure, the inequalities

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lities of condition among mankind. It hath contrived to diffuse pleasure through all ranks; and to bring the high and the low nearer to a level with each other, than might at first be supposed. It hath smoothed the most rugged tracts of human life; and hath gilded with rays of borrowed light its most dreary scenes.

One instance of Divine Wisdom, in framing our nature, is so remarkable as to demand particular attention; that is, the measure according to which God hath dispensed knowledge and ignorance to man. There is nothing of which we are more ready to complain, than of our narrow and confined views of nature, and of Providence, and of all things around us: And yet upon examination, it will be found, that our views extend, on every side, just as far as they ought; and that, to see and know more than is allowed us, instead of bringing any advantage, would produce certain misery*. —— We pry, for instance, with impatient curiosity, into future events. Happily for us, they are veiled and covered up; and one peep

* See Serm. IV. Vol. i. and Serm. IX. Vol. iv.

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SERMON XX

behind that veil, were it permitted, would be sufficient to poison the whole comfort of our days, by the anticipation of sorrows to come. — In like manner, we often wish with eagerness to penetrate into the secrets of nature, to look into the invisible world, and to be made acquainted with the whole destiny of man. Our wish is denied; we are environed on all hands with mystery; and that mystery is our happiness: for, were those great invisible objects *fully* disclosed, the sight of them would confound and overwhelm us. It would either totally derange our feeble faculties, or would engross our attention to such a degree, as to lay us aside from the business and concerns of this world. It would have the same effect, as if we were carried away from the earth, and mingled among the inhabitants of some other planet.— The knowledge that is allowed to us, was designed to fit us for acting our part in our present state. At the exact point, therefore, where usefulness ends, knowledge stops, and ignorance commences. Light shines upon us, as long as it serves to guide our path; but forsakes us, as soon



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as it becomes noxious to the eye; and salutary darkness is appointed to close the scene. — Thoughtless and stupid must that man be, who, in all this furniture of the human mind, in this exact adjustment of its several powers to the great purposes of life, discerns not the hand of adorable wisdom, as well as of infinite Goodness. SERMON XX.

In the *second* place, Let us contemplate the same wisdom as exhibiting itself to us in the moral government of the world. We are informed by revelation, that this life is designed by Providence to be an introductory part of existence to intelligent beings; a state of education and discipline, where, creatures fallen from their original rank, may gradually recover their rectitude and virtue. Under this view, which is in itself perfectly consonant to all that reason discovers, we shall find the general course of human affairs, confused as it may sometimes appear, to have been ordered with exquisite wisdom. — It was necessary to such a state, that all the active powers of man should be brought forth

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forth into exercise, and completely tried. It became proper, therefore, that there should be a mixture of characters in the world, and that men should be shewn in a variety of situations *. Hence that diversity of tempers and dispositions which are found in society; those inequalities in rank and station, which we see taking place; and those different talents and inclinations which prompt men to different pursuits. By these means, every department in society is filled up; and every man has some sphere prepared for him, in which he can act. He is brought forth as on a busy stage, where opportunity is given for his character to display itself fully. — His life is, with great propriety, varied by interchanges of prosperity and adversity. Always prosperous, he would become dissipated, indolent and giddy: Always afflicted, he would be fretful, dejected, and sullen. There are few persons, therefore, or none, whose lot shares not of both these states; in order that every disposition of the heart may be explored, and every mean of improvement afforded.

* See Serm. IV. Vol. iv.

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As man is ultimately designed for a higher state of existence than the present, it was not proper that this world should prove a paradise to him, or should afford him that complete satisfaction which he incessantly pursues. Disappointments, therefore, are often made to blast his hopes; and, even while the comforts of life last, they are always mixed with some troubles; in order that an excessive attachment to this world may gradually be loosened. The course of things is evidently so ordered by Providence, that occurrences shall be always happening, to bring down the most prosperous to a level with the rest of his brethren, and to raise up, in their turn, the low and the distressed.

In the midst of those vicissitudes, which are so obviously conducive to improvement, both wisdom and goodness required, that the Supreme Governour of the world should be seen to protect the interests, and favour the side of virtue. But in the degree of evidence, with which this was to be shown, it was no less requisite, that a proper temperament should be observed. Had virtue been always completely re-



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warded, and made happy on earth, men would no longer have had a motive for aspiring to a more blessed state. In the case of every crime, had divine justice interposed to bring complete punishment on the head of the criminal; or had all the felicity which is prepared for the just in a future world, and all the misery which there awaits the wicked, been already displayed to the view, and rendered sensible to the feelings of men; there would have been an end of that state of trial, for which our whole condition on earth was intended. It was necessary therefore, that at present, we should *see through a glass darkly*. A certain degree of mystery and obscurity was, with perfect wisdom, left on the conduct of the Almighty *. — But, amidst that obscurity sufficient encouragement and support are in the mean time given to virtue; sufficient ground is afforded for the full belief, that it is what the Deity loves, and will finally reward. His approbation of it is signified to every man by the voice of conscience. Inward satis-

* See Serm. IV. Vol. i.

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faction and peace are made always to belong to it; and general esteem and honour for the most part to attend it. On the other hand, the wicked, in no situation of life, are allowed to be truly happy. Their vices and their passions are made to trouble their prosperity; and their punishment to grow out of their crimes. Let any one attentively recollect the material incidents of his life; and he will, for the most part, be able to trace the chief misfortunes which have befallen him to some guilt he has contracted, or some folly he has committed *: Such is the profound wisdom with which Providence conducts its counsels, that although it does not appear to interpose, men are made to reap from their actions, the fruits which they had deserved; their iniquities *to correct them, and their backslidings to reprove them*; and while they suffer, they are forced to acknowledge the justice of their punishment.—These are not matters of rare or occasional observation; but deeply interwoven with the texture of human affairs. They discover a



* See Serm. XIII. Vol. iv.



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regular plan, a formed system, according to which the whole train of Providence proceeds; and which manifests to every serious observer the consummate wisdom of its Author.—As thus, in the constitution of human nature and in the moral government of the world, Divine wisdom so remarkably appears, I must observe,

In the *third* place, That in the redemption of the world, and in the œconomy of grace, it shines no less conspicuously. The subject which opens to us here is too extensive to be fully illustrated at present; but the great lines of it are obvious *.—In carrying on a plan, by which forgiveness was to be dispensed to an offending race, wisdom required that the authority of the legislator should be fully preserved, and no such relaxation be introduced into government, as might give licence or encouragement to offenders. Accordingly, the most admirable provision was made for these important purposes by the interposition of the Son of God suffering

* See Serm. V. Vol. i.—Serm. V. Vol. ii.—Serm. XV. Vol. ii.—Serm. V. Vol. iv.

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and dying for sinners. The sovereign awe of justice is maintained, while justice is tempered with mercy. Men are bound to righteousness, under the highest sanctions; and ample security and consolation are, at the same time, afforded to the penitent. By the instructions, and example, of their Saviour, they are instructed in their duty; and through a Mediator and Intercessor, they are encouraged to offer their worship and prayers to the Almighty. They are assured that, in whatever is too arduous for human nature to perform, they shall be assisted by a Divine Spirit; and under all trials and difficulties, they are supported by the express promise of that eternal life which is brought to light by the gospel.—It is not possible for the understanding to conceive any method of salvation, planned with more goodness and executed with more wisdom, than what is shewn in the gospel of Christ. The consideration of this constitution alone, gives us full reason to join in that exclamation of the Apostle: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable*





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SERMON XX. *searchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* *

FROM this short survey which we have taken of Divine wisdom, as discovering itself, in the whole complex frame of the moral world; in the constitution of human nature; in the government of human affairs; and in the redemption of the human race; we cannot but perceive how much reason we have to prostrate ourselves before God, and with all humility to worship and adore.—When we view that immense structure of the universe in which we dwell, when we think of Him, whose wisdom has planned the whole system of being; whose mind comprehends, whose counsels direct, the whole course of events, from the beginning to the end of time; by whom nothing is so inconsiderable as to be overlooked, or so transient as to be forgotton; who attends to the concerns of the poor man in his cottage, while he is steering the sun and the moon in their course through the heavens; into what astonishment and

* Rom. xi. 33.

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self-annihilation do we fall! Before him all our boasted knowledge is ignorance and our wisdom is folly. Wherever we cast our eyes on his works and ways, we find all things adjusted in *number*, *weight*, *and measure*; and after all that we can survey, Lo! these are but a part of his ways; and *how small a portion is heard of him!*

It is the power of God, which produces among the multitude of men any impressions of religion. When thunder roars in the heavens, or an earthquake shakes the ground, they are struck with awe, and disposed to worship an invisible power. But such impressions of Deity are occasional and transitory. The lasting reverence of a Supreme Being arises, in a well-informed mind, from the display of that infinite wisdom which all the universe presents. Its operations are constantly, though silently, going on around us. We may view it in the peaceful and sedate state of the universe, as well as in its greatest commotions; we behold it in every insect that moves on the ground, at the same time that we admire it in the



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revolutions of the celestial bodies. Happy for us if the contemplation shall nourish that temper of habitual devotion, which so well becomes dependent beings, and is so intimately connected with all virtue * !

But the chief effect that ought to be produced by meditation on the Divine wisdom, is perfect resignation to the Governor of the universe, and entire trust in his administration. Our private misfortunes and disappointments are too often the subject of querulous complaints, and even of unjust suspicions of Providence. But when in the whole natural and moral world, we behold an arrangement of things which plainly discovers the most consummate wisdom, can we believe, that in the arrangement of our petty concerns, this wisdom is dormant and neglectful? How much more reason is there to think, that our ignorance of the Divine plans misleads our judgment, than that the wisdom of the Almighty has erred in directing our private affairs?——Divine wisdom, as I observed in the beginning, is an exertion of Divine benevolence. It

* See Serm. XIX. Vol. iii.

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has, it can have, no other scope than to accomplish the best ends by the most proper means. Let the wisdom therefore, and the goodness, of the Deity, be ever conjoined in our idea. Let every new discovery of Divine wisdom, be a new ground of hope, of joy, and of cordial submission, to every virtuous man. Let him be thankful that he lives in a world, where nothing happens to him by chance, or at random; but where a great, a wise, and beneficient Mind continually superintends every event. SERMON XX.

Under the faith of this great principle of religion, let us proceed in the course of our duty, with steadfast and undismayed mind. Let us retain faithful allegiance to our Creator and our Redeemer; and then we may always hope the best; and *cast our care upon him who careth for us. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Although thou sayest, thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.*——Let us begin every undertaking with an humble dependence on his assistance for enabling us to prosecute it to



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the end. When our undertakings are finished, and the close of life approaches, with praise to him let us conclude all our labours.

*Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

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# SERMON XXI.

## The COMPASSION and BENEFICENCE of the DEITY,

[Preached before the Society for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Eſtabliſhed Church of Scotland, 20th May 1766.]

JEREMIAH, xlix. 11.

*Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

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NO subject is more open to general observation, or more confirmed by manifold experience, than the goodness of God. The contemplation of the universe, in which we dwell, presents it perpetually to our view. Amidst the vast extent of creation, we discover no instance of mere pomp, or useless grandeur, but behold every thing contributing to the general good, and rendered subservient

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vient to the welfare of the rational or sensible world. In the administration of Providence, the same principle of beneficence is conspicuous. The seasons are made regularly to return, and the earth to flourish; supply is bountifully provided for the wants of all creatures; and numberless comforts are prepared to sweeten human life. Most justly is he who hath established, and who upholds, this admirable order of things, to be esteemed the Father of mercies: and, accordingly, in this view, he is often celebrated in Scripture. *The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. His tender mercies are over all his works. His mercy is great unto the heavens, and it endureth for ever.*

It appears worthy of particular observation that there is one light, in which more frequently than in any other, the goodness of God is presented to us in the Sacred Writings, namely, the light of compassion to the distresses of mankind. Most of the situations are mentioned in which men are considered as most forlorn; and in some passages of Scripture, God is represented as interesting himself, in a peculiar



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culiar manner, for those who are in such situations. Particular emphasis is always laid upon this circumstance, in the general views which are given of his goodness. He is the *Hearer of prayer, unto whom all flesh shall come.* But he is described as listening with particular attention to the *cry of the poor*; and *regarding the prayer of the destitute: He will prepare their heart, and cause his ear to hear.* All creatures are the objects of his providential care. But *the widow and the fatherless, the bowed down and the broken in heart,* are particularly attended to, and commiserated by him. *The Lord executeth judgment for the oppressed; the Lord preserveth the stranger; he looseth the prisoner, and giveth food to the hungry. He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor hides he his face from them; but hears when they cry unto him* *. In short, when we are deprived of all human consolation and aid, the Almighty is represented as then most accessible to



*. Pf. cii. 17.; x. 17.; lxviii. 5.; lxix. 33.; cxlvi, 7.; xxii. 24, &c. &c.

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our prayers, and most disposed to help and relieve us.

The words which I have chosen for the text afford a very amiable view of that compassion which Scripture so often ascribes to the Supreme Being. The context in which they stand contains much dark and mysterious prophecy relating to nations in the neighbourhood of Judea, but leads to no particular illustration of the text. The words of it, taken by themselves, are plainly to be understood as spoken by God to an aged parent, who in the view of approaching dissolution, is anxious about the future condition of his family in the world; and they present a most affecting display of God's compassionate regard to the children of those who have been his faithful servants on earth. *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*——It will be worthy of our attention at present, to inquire into the reasons why the Almighty is pleased to represent himself so often to us under this view; not only as the just and good Ruler of the universe, which is the



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first and leading idea we naturally form of him, but as the Patron and Friend of the distressed part of mankind. SERMON XXI.

It will be found, that there are two very important purposes which such discoveries of the Divine nature serve. First, they furnish particular ground for trusting in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life; and next, they exhibit the pattern of that disposition, which we ought, in our measure, humbly to follow and imitate.

I. THE discoveries of Divine compassion were purposely intended to furnish to us particular ground for trust in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life. Man, during his abode on earth, is exposed to various distresses. Even in his most flourishing state, his condition is extremely precarious. Prosperous as he may at one time seem to be, he cannot tell how soon, by some unforeseen vicissitude, he may be humbled to the dust; and still less can he tell what may in future befall his children, to whose fortunes he often looks with anxious solicitude. In the moments when his mind is oppressed, either by the

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the immediate feeling of sorrows or by the dread of impending evils, it is natural for him to fly to that Supreme Being under whose direction all human events are placed, and earnestly to implore protection from him.——But though he hold the belief that justice and goodness are ever to be found at the throne of the Almighty, yet, even there, particular discouragements meet him. For that Supreme Being to whom he looks up is a great and awful Being. His nature is, to us, unknown. He dwells in the secret place of Eternity; and is surrounded with clouds and darkness. We hear his tremendous voice in the thunder; and in every commotion of the elements we behold the irresistible hand of his power. A nature so infinitely superiour to our own, cannot be looked up to without some measure of dismay. It is overwhelming to the timid apprehension of the distressed. It is contemplated with that awful and mysterious reverence which overpowers confidence and trust.

It is for this reason that, in condescension to human weakness, God has been pleased

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pleased so often to represent himself as actuated by a principle of compassion and pity. This gives a shade and softening to the awful greatness of the Divinity. It brings down his goodness to the level of our conception, and fits it to be the object of our trust. Compassion is a principle which we all feel and know. We know that it is the strongest of all benevolent instincts in our nature, and that it tends directly to interest us in behalf of those who need our aid. We are taught to believe that a similar attribute belongs to the Divine nature; in order that, from that species of goodness which we are best acquainted with, and which we can most rely upon, we may be trained both to love our Almighty Benefactor, and as long as we are in the practice of our duty, to trust to his protection, amidst every distress. When we hear such a voice of tenderness, as that which my text utters, proceeding from the Almighty, our hearts are comforted. Distrust and dismay are removed. We are no longer oppressed by his greatness. We can draw near to him as to a Father in heaven, before whom we

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can, with humble confidence, pour out our sorrows; and can trust that, though all our earthly friends should neglect us, our prayers will attract his compassionate regard.

Compassion to the unfortunate, as it is exerted among men, is indeed accompanied with certain disturbed and painful feelings, arising from sympathy with those whom we pity. But every such feeling we must remove from our thoughts, when we ascribe an affection of this nature to the Deity. It is true, that, in Scripture language, the Divine compassion is sometimes figured by strong allusions to the relenting struggles and passionate meltings of the human heart. But we easily perceive that such representations are to be understood with the allowances which figurative language requires. All that is amiable in compassion, belongs to God; but all that is imperfect in it must be left to man. In the Supreme Being, there can be no perturbation or uneasiness; no contrast of feelings, nor fluctuation of purpose. His compassion imports a kind regard to the circumstances of the unhappy.

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But still it is such a regard as suits the perfection of the great Governour of the universe, whose benignity, undisturbed by any violent emotion, ever maintains the same tranquil tenour, like the unruffled and uninterrupted serenity of the highest heavens.

It is important to observe, that this pity and compassion of our heavenly Father, extends itself to our moral and spiritual concerns, in like manner as to our natural and external distresses. In that great dispensation of the redemption of the world by his Son Jesus Christ, he is always represented in Scripture as moved by pity for our fallen and wretched estate. The same principle which leads him to regard with compassion the widow and the fatherless, led him to look down with compassion on an helpless and forlorn race, degraded from their original honour. From infinite mercy he sent his Son *to seek and to save that which was lost.* According to the prophetical language of the Old Testament, *He looked upon us; and his time was a time of love. He saw that there was no man; He beheld*

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*held that there was no intercessor, and his own arm brought Salvation. He laid his help on one who was mighty to save. He saw us in our blood, and said, Live**.—

Agreeable to this spirit of compassion, displayed in our redemption, is the whole dispensation of Divine grace towards man in his present state of infirmity. It speaks continually the doctrine of consolation and merciful aid; *grace to be sufficient for us, and strength to be made perfect in our weakness. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust* †.

I cannot conclude this head without observing how much it adds to the value of the Christian religion, that it hath discovered the Deity to us in a light so amiable. When the nations of the earth worshipped a God unknown, or one whom they arrayed in nothing but vengeful thunders, the true God hath come forth from behind the cloud, and made himself known to us; known not only as a

* Ezek. xvi. 8. Isaiah, lix. 16.
† 2 Cor. xii. 9. Psal. ciii. 13.

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just and good Ruler, but as a compassionate Father, in whom, amidst all their distresses, the virtuous may trust and hope. I now proceed to observe, SERMON XXI.

II. THAT such discoveries of the Divine nature were designed, not only to administer encouragement and consolation, but also to exhibit the pattern of that disposition which we are bound, in our measure, to imitate and follow. To this purpose tend the repeated exhortations of Scripture, to *be followers of God, as dear children; to be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful.* That hardness of heart which renders men insensible to the distresses of their brethren, that insolence of prosperity which inspires them with contempt of those who are fallen below them, are always represented in Scripture as dispositions most opposite to the nature of God, and most hateful in his sight. In order to make this appear in the strongest light, he hath turned his goodness chiefly into the channel of compassionate regard to those whom the selfish and the proud despise. He hath avowedly taken up their



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cause, that he might state himself as an antagonist to such as would bear them down; that he might confound and put to the blush that arrogance of men which makes them slight any of their own brethren. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord, to set them in safety from him that puffeth at them* *. *Lord*, says the Psalmist, *thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt arise to judge the fatherless, and the oppressed, that the man of earth may oppress no more* †.

Consider, I beseech you, whether any virtue can admit of any higher recommendation than its being that disposition under the character of which the Almighty chooses to be peculiarly known to us: How can we claim any relation to the Father of mercies, or how look up to him for compassion and grace, if we show no bowels of mercy, gentleness, and kindness, to one another?—The whole plan, indeed, on which he hath formed human nature, and all the circumstances in which he hath placed us on earth, are plainly contrived to

* Psal. xii. 5. † Psal. x. 17, 18.

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excite affections of benevolence, and to enforce works of mercy. Not only hath he planted compassion in the human breast, as one of the strongest instincts there, but he hath so connected us in society, as necessarily to require that our benevolent instincts should be brought into exercise. For it is apparent that no man, in any rank of life, even the highest, is sufficient for his own well-being. He can neither supply his own wants, nor provide for his own comforts, without the co-operation of others. The dependence here is mutual between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. Each, in one way or other, calls on each for aid. All are so linked together, as to be impelled by a thousand motives to assist one another in the time of need. This is what nature, what society, what providence, all speak with a loud voice; a voice which may be said to have gone forth even to the ends of the earth, and to have been heard and understood by the most barbarous tribes of men. For among savage and uncultivated nations, no less than among the most civilized and polished, the energy of com-

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passion is felt, and its claims are recognized and obeyed.

In the course of human life, innumerable occasions present themselves for all the exercices of that humanity and benignity, to which we are so powerfully prompted. The diversities of rank among men, the changes of fortune to which all, in every rank, are liable, the necessities of the poor, the wants of helpless youth, the infirmities of declining age, are always giving opportunities for the display of humane affections. There is perhaps no form in which benevolence appears more interesting, than when it is employed in providing relief for the families and children of those who stand in need of aid, in order that the young may be trained up by proper education for acting an useful part in the world. Benefits conveyed by this channel are often more important than any other acts of liberality. Besides the great advantage which they bring to society, they have the pleasing effect of awakening all the virtuous sensibilities of the heart both in those who confer, and in those who receive them. They are often felt with warmer

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warmer relish by a family in distress, and productive of more tender gratitude, than could have been raised by any other mode of beneficence. This is rendered sensible to every heart by that beautiful expression of the Divine compassion in the text; *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.* SERMON XXI.

By the train of sentiment we have pursued, your thoughts, my brethren, will now be naturally led to the consideration of that institution which has given occasion to the meeting of this day; *The Society formed for the benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Established Church of Scotland.*

In entering on this part of the subject, I trust that I may be permitted to say a few words concerning that order of men, in behalf of whose descendants the favour of the public is now requested. Though belonging myself to that order, yet as my advanced age and long experience may reasonably be supposed to have corrected the prejudices and cooled the ardour of



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partiality, some weight, I hope, will be allowed to my testimony; when now, in the fifty-fourth year of my ministry, after having seen successions of ministers, in various parts of the country, rise and fall, and after long acquaintance with many, of divided sentiments, among my brethren, I can with confidence declare it as my opinion, that there exists not any where a more respectable and useful class of men than the Clergy of the Church of Scotland. Among such a numerous body, I readily admit than some exceptions will be found to the character which I now give of them. Considering human frailty, this is no more than was naturally to be expected. But, taking the ministers of this church in general, I can venture to assert than they are a well-informed and enlightened set of men; decent and irreproachable in their behaviour, conscientious in the discharge of their pastoral duties, and very generally esteemed by the people under their care. There was a time, when the Presbyterian clergy lay under the imputation of being sour in their tempers, narrow in their opinions, severe and

and intolerant in their principles. But as, together with the diffusion of knowledge, a more liberal spirit has pervaded the clerical order in this part of Britain, it will be found that their manners now are conciliating; that they study to promote harmony and good order in their parishes; that they have shown themselves addicted to useful literature, and in several branches of it have eminently distinguished themselves; and that while they are edifying and consolatory to the lowest, they have acquired just respect from the higher classes of men,



As long, therefore, as this country shall be preserved from the contagion of that false philosophy, which, by overthrowing all religious establishments, has engendered so much impiety, and wrought so much mischief, in a neighbouring land; as long as the existence of Christian faith, and of religious principles, shall be considered as essential to the welfare of a nation, it may reasonably, I think, be expected, that such a body of men as I have mentioned shall be held entitled to the regard and good-will of their fellow-citizens and countrymen.



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Circumstances there are, which give particular occasion for this regard and good-will to be called forth. You all know the nature of that provision which is made by the public for the established clergy of this country. It is such as is suited to that sober and frugal manner of living which is expected from ministers of the gospel. Though in consideration of the growing prosperity of the country, and of its natural consequence, the increased rate of every expence, it has been found reasonable that, of late years, some addition should be made to the provision of many of the ministers, yet still their condition approaches not to what can be termed opulence in any degree. It is such as to raise them above contempt; such as to afford a decent subsistence for themselves and their families; but such as seldom or never can enable them, without some other sources of revenue, to make provision for their children when going forth into the world, especially if their family be numerous.

It was the consideration of this circumstance that lately gave rise to the Society in

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in favour of the Sons of the Clergy. SERMON XC.
Many a minister who, for a tract of years has faithfully laboured in the discharge of every duty to his flock, has felt, towards the close of his days, what a blessing it would have proved to him, if such a society had existed in his time, to which he could have looked for aid.—— Represent to yourselves, my friends, one of this character,—and the representation which I am now to give is not the work of fancy, but founded upon what often in fact takes place.—— Figure, I say, a worthy Clergyman, now in the decline of life, foreseeing the end of his labours drawing near, surrounded with a family of children, to whom his chief care had been devoted, and in whom his heart had long been bound up. Their education, from their earliest years, he had conducted, or at least superintended himself, with paternal fondness. Whatever his scanty stores could afford, he had cheerfully expended, in giving all the advantage to their education which his own village, or which the nearest county town could yield. He had made every preparation that was in his

power

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power to make, for their acting a proper part in future life. But the time of preparation is finished. The gay season of childhood is over. The period is arrived when they must go forth; must leave that paternal mansion where, in the midst of their youthful companions, they had spent many happy days; must go to provide for themselves, the best they can, in a world, which to them is unknown. And whither are they to go?——Of the few friends their father ever had, some are now gone down to the dust. Others, with whom he once lived in familiar intimacy, lifted up now with the pride of opulence, have forgotten him and his family. One of his sons, at least, he fondly wished to have educated for that profession to which he himself had been so long attached. But, living at a distance from any of the seats of learning, and having no protector to whose assistance he could look, he feels with regret that he is unable for the attempt. Some of his children he must send away to seek their fortune in a distant land. Others must be consigned to the dangers of the ocean, or be reduced to gain

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gain their bread by following some of the mean and laborious occupations of life. Viewing the dark and discouraging prospect that is before them, the father's heart is sore, when he bids adieu to his children. With tears in his eyes, he gives them his blessing as they depart. Little more it is in his power to give them; but he commits them to the protection of their father's God.—— How happy, if in these mournful moments, a voice of such a nature as this could reach his ears; *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.* SERMON XXI.

ANIMATED by the desire of imitating that spirit of Divine compassion which breathes in these words, a few respectable gentlemen in this city formed, six years ago, the plan of a Society for assisting the Sons of the Clergy. The institution, as soon as it was known, met with public approbation and favour. It was early distinguished, and amply assisted by Royal munificence. It was incorporated by Royal charter; and, through the generosity of the public, has prospered so far, that

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SERMON XXI.

that the Society has already been enabled to give aid to a considerable number of the Sons of Clergymen of this church. The aid which the society, in an infant state could as yet give, has been small; as it is confined to what the interest of their capital allows them to bestow. They earnestly wish to become more effectually useful, by enlarging their provision for the education of Sons; and hope to be enabled, in due time, to give assistance to the Daughters, as well as to the Sons, of ministers; so as to afford comfort to a widowed mother, and to the whole of a disconsolate family. For it is to be observed, that it is not merely to a literary education, or to preparation for the church, that the intentions of the Society are directed. They mean so to apply their beneficence, that the families of ministers may be assisted to acquire the necessary qualifications for pursuing any useful employment in the world, for which they appear to be most fitted.

Among other inducements which may encourage the public to promote this beneficent plan, there is one which I cannot, on this

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this occasion, omit to mention; that is, the signal success with which many Sons of Scots Clergymen have been blessed, in filling with honour several of the important departments of society. As I have not myself the honour of belonging to that class, I can speak with more freedom on this topic than some other of my brethren. Not to mention the well known and distinguished names of several who at present possess, with much dignity, stations in the church, and chairs in the universities, and some now gone, who will be long remembered, as having done no small honour, by their literary productions, to this part of the island; let me desire you to look round on the most respectable stations of busy life, and to consider how many of those who now make a high figure at the bar, some on the bench, many in the commercial, the military, and the naval professions, were born and bred under the humble roof of a minister.——Nor is this success to be ascribed to any favourable coincidence of circumstances at this time more than any other. It is the natural result of





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SERMON XXI.

the manner in which they were brought up. Educated in good principles, and formed to sober manners, by pious and virtuous parents, they enter on the world less tainted than others by fashionable vices and follies. By the situation of their parents they were inured, from their earliest youth, to temperance and habits of application. They come forward, not altogether ignorant and unlettered, like the children of the meaner classes of men, but with the foundations of good education and useful knowledge. At the same time, they see and know that it is not to fortune and to friends, but to their own industry and exertions, they must trust for future success; and that only according to the opinion entertained of their merit, they can hope to be patronized by others. Hence it comes to pass that young persons of this description often advance themselves more quickly, and act their part more successfully, than others who, from their birth and fortune, have enjoyed the benefits of a more improved and ornamented education; but whose opulence sometimes

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sometimes supersedes labour, encourages indolence, and perhaps fosters dissipation and love of pleasure. SERMON XXI.

These are considerations which tend to bespeak publick favour in behalf of the institution which I now recommend. Consider my friends, that by befriending and assisting it, you contribute to bring forward a new race, who, like those of the same rank that have gone before them, may come, in their day, to be beneficial to their country and to the world. It must not be forgotten, that assistance to bring them forward becomes now more necessary than it was to the former race, in consequence of the great additional expence which is well known now to attend every part of education. By seasonable generosity, on this occasion, you may be ripening in secret the seeds of future genius; you may be bringing forward to maturity those young plants which shall flourish hereafter in the land; and which may perhaps attain such strength, and rise to such a height, as to protect others under their shade.



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SERMON XXI.

To the honour of the present age, it must be acknowledged not to be deficient in a spirit of humanity. Frequent instances both of publick and private beneficence come forth on every proper occasion. In this city, many a noble monument appears of charitable foundations and institutions; some destined to educate the children of the needy, others to furnish maintenance for the poor, to provide for the aged, or to receive and relieve the sick and the distressed. By their means much timely succour is given, and many a distress is mitigated. The institution for the sake of which we are now assembled, partaking of the same benevolent spirit with the others, reaches to a more respectable class of men, and aims at a more extensive object. Its purpose is, to prevent those evils which would arise to the publick, from the children of worthy parents being left to languish in that hopeless indigence which throws them first as a burden on society, and may afterwards render them a dangerous nuisance to it. Instead of this, it aims at bringing them into such a state as affords a reasonable prospect of their proving use-



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ful members of the community, and perhaps of their ranking among its ornaments and supports.

So good a design Providence has already begun to favour, and we hope will continue to bless. After we are laid in the dust, the generation that succeeds us may experience its happy effects. They who now contribute by their generosity to carry it forward will, in the mean time, enjoy the satisfaction of having adopted the benevolent spirit of the Christian religion, they will enjoy the satisfaction of having imitated, as they could, that compassion of our heavenly Father which, in so affecting a manner, is expressed by the words of the text; words, which I hope will continue to dwell, with a lasting and tender impression, on all our hearts; *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me!*

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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